THE LEADER

MARY · DILLON

Grad. Nurses Club
164 S. Los Robles Ave
Pasadena

THE LEADER

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"But he did not look at the face of the watch; instead, he opened the back and held it toward her."

See page 359.

The Leader

C (Johnson)

By MARY DILLON

Author of "The Rose of Old St. Louis" and "In Old Bellaire"

Illustrated by Ruth M. Hallock

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To

MY STERNEST CRITIC

AND

MOST GENEROUS ADMIRER

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FOREWORD

In an earlier story I have made a claim for historical accuracy—in this one I desire to make a counter-claim. My story is in no sense history. If I have used some incidents familiar to every one, it was only because they were in themselves picturesque and lent themselves readily to the purposes of a writer of fiction; and, having become common property through the medium of the newspapers, they had become mine to use as I would.

For the rest, my story is fiction pure and simple and cannot even claim to be a "novel with a purpose." Its sole purpose is to tell the story of two lives as pleasantly as may be, and as much for the gratification of the writer as for the edification of the reader.

Mary Dillon.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

JOHN DALTON, a political idol

MARGARET LE BEAU, A bachelor maid

PEYTON LE BEAU, Margaret's somewhat cynical but adoring elder brother

HUGH KENT, A Kentwick Squire and a thorough good fellow

MRS. PAXTON, A charming widow, sister to Hugh

JULIE DELAUNEY, A perennially young woman

FRANK SETON, Bashful, but true gentleman and loyal friend to Dalton

'TIA ELISA, A dear old spinster

MISS MOLLY, Station master at Kentwick

MINOR CHARACTERS, (Politicians, society people, Negroes and others)

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PROLOGUE

THE way train for San Carlos was standing on the siding, waiting for the great through flyer from the west to go thundering by on the main track. As it had drawn up to the little station of Kentwick, its conductor had sprung off and darted into the station house, while the engineer merely slowed down, expecting the conductor to be back in time to catch the rear step of the last car.

"Any orders, Miss Molly?" the conductor shouted, as he stuck his head in the door but left his feet outside, prepared to turn and run for his train at the expected "No!"

"Who are you?" asked Miss Molly with exasperating deliberateness.

"I'm sixty-five."

"For the l-a-n-d-s *sake!*" ejaculated Miss Molly. "You oughta been here at eight o'clock, and now its ten."

"I know. But hurry up will you? That's a good girl! Any orders?"

"Sure! Your'e to wait for number two, and you'd better get off that main line mighty quick; I'm expectin' her down any minute."

The conductor turned, signalled his orders to the engineer and ran forward to throw the switch himself rather than wait for a brakesman. His signal meant, "Hurry on to the siding, number two's coming down the road,"

and the engineer lost no time in obeying.

But as is the fashion with through trains, number two was late, and the short local lay simmering on the siding in the hot September sun, a full half hour. There were but two coaches, a smoker and one other, denominated by the polite conductor, "a ladies coach." In this rear coach there were but few passengers and most of those were well-dressed, with the sleek look that belongs to the city-bred. Most of them too were women or young girls, going out from the great city not far away to spend a day in the country, and vainly fretting at the repeated delays that were spoiling their holiday.

A young man, seated well in the rear of the car and on the side next the station, would have caught the eye of an observing passenger entering the train from his very unlikeness to the dainty creatures in light summer robes, or the few slim well-groomed youths accompanying them. A farmer lad, from his rough dress, his stoical, almost stolid patience was in fine contrast to their fuming impatience.

Yet there was not one on the car to whom these frequent delays meant so much as to him. For years he had been looking forward to this day when he should enter, a Freshman, the little western college at San Carlos, that seemed to him all that the great universities seem to a more sophisticated boy. He had worked hard and lived meagerly, saving every penny for this day, and now when his heart was throbbing tumultuously and his brain whirling at the thought of being so near his goal, every moment of delay was well-nigh intolerable.

Yet his face might have been the masque of some rugged old Roman so unmoved it seemed, and only the closest observer would have noted that the strong square jaw was set in a grim determination to hold himself quiet, and the keen gray eyes under the shock of dark brown hair occasionally emitted fiery flashes like the spurts of flame that burst uncontrollably from mouldering fires.

Nothing escaped his observation; the silly speeches of the youths and the simpering consciousness with which the maidens received them, won from him half scorn and half admiration. He envied the ease with which the speeches were made while he mentally sneered at their vapidity, and wondered at the favor with which they were received by creatures who had seemed to him at first glance to be of far finer mould, and doubtless on a higher intellectual plane than any he had hitherto known. He was a young man of rapid mental processes, and he speedily came to the conclusion that they were like all their class. He had known nothing of the world's upper stratum, but from occasional distant glimpses of it he had unconsciously idealized it, and set for himself as a goal to one day enter it and be of it. Now with the sweeping generalizations of youth he decided that what had so attracted him by its glitter in the distance was on nearer view only tinsel; and with a youth's arrogance, believing himself intellectually the superior of the members of that charmed circle he had once thought so far above him, none

the less did he hold to his determination to enter it and dominate it.

He had heard the brief conversation between the conductor and Miss Molly, and now—having finally settled the mental status of his companions in the car—he was idly watching the by-play between her and a little circle of her admirers. The engineer had left his engine with the fireman and had joined the conductor and brakesman in idly chaffing Miss Molly; and she was enjoying the chaffing and holding her own, turning their clumsy shafts of wit with ready and loud-voiced retorts. Evidently Miss Molly was a character and a favorite with the trainmen on the line; and the young man watching her, thought she compared very favorably with the butterflies in the car, her face shining with amiability, and her ready tongue drawing roars of laughter from her rough audience, as one after the other came under its lash.

The neat little station-house with its tiny garden, Miss Molly's pride, glowing with autumn blooms—flaunting cannas, deep hued dahlias, golden marigolds, gentle petunias, all blended together with the soft white mist of the sweet elyssum—was set in a vast field of the cloth of gold. The wonderful Golden Glow of the West seethed round it in great billows of bloom that threatened to drown it in radiance, and then rolled away in undulating swells till it met the serried ranks of bannered corn sweeping up distant ridges to their wooded crests. Young John Dalton knew enough of the geography of

his native state to know that he was in the famous Florissant valley—foremost among the fertile valleys of the world—and his practiced eye took in the signs of that amazing fertility in the luxuriance of vegetation that oppressed him with its sense of opulence.

At he foot of a ridge not far away between the rolling meadows of gold and the rising ranks of corn, there wound the white ribbon of a country road; and down this road there came driving now a little equipage that made John's untravelled eyes open wide. From a distance it was like nothing he had ever seen, and when it turned sharply at right angles from the white road into the short stretch of dark loam that led directly through the low fields to the station, a nearer view did not detract from its strangeness to him. Presently it drew up in the rear of the station: two tiny white Shetland ponies harnessed tandem to a dainty little pony-cart. On the seat of the cart, holding the driving reins, was a little girl of eight or ten with a glory of red gold curls falling over the broad collar of her pale blue sailor suit, and erect by her side, with an intelligent air of guardianship, a beautiful glossy-haired collie.

The child wound the reins around the whip-stock and sprang lightly from the cart, the dog following her with a bound. John Dalton watched her with interest; she was a new species to him—the child of many generations of wealth and culture, and beautiful as an angel to his unaccustomed eyes.

She ran lightly around the station-house to where Miss Molly was holding court.

"Miss Molly! Miss Molly!" she cried eagerly, "Has the ten-fifteen come in?"

Miss Molly looked up brightly with a smile.

"No, Peggy dear, it's waitin' down at Franklin for the flyer to pass it."

"Will it be here very soon, do you think?" asked the child anxiously.

"Not for fifteen minutes anyway, Honey, perhaps longer. It's *too* bad! There's such a time with trains to-day on account of the big wash-out down the road yesterday."

Much to Miss Molly's astonishment, the child did not seem to think it was too bad.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad! Now I'll have time," clapping her hands rapturously. "Come Shep, we must hurry!"

Child and dog bounded across the road and were swallowed up in the golden glow reaching high above their heads. In a few minutes they emerged, the child bearing in her arms a great mass of the brilliant blooms—hardly more golden than her own bright locks—and began at once to decorate the two ponies quickly and skillfully. As she finished, she stepped back and viewed her work critically, head on one side, then she tripped forward and with a deft touch here and there, arranged them more to her satisfaction.

John, watching her with interest, thought the result a little queer but undeniably picturesque: clusters of nodding yellow flowers at the ears of the ponies, masses of them drooping like golden saddle cloths over their white haunches, and a tall bunch of them erect in the whip-

stock.

The child was evidently pleased with her work; she shook her finger at the ponies with a parting admonition:

"Now Jack and Jill
Be good and stand still,"

and ran away, laughing at her rhyme, to interview Miss Molly once more.

"Is it time *yet*, Miss Molly?" And this time her anxiety was evidently not that the train should delay but that it should hurry.

"Not quite, dear," said Miss Molly, patting her golden curls, "But there! for the l-a-n-d-s *sake!* if that aint the flyer now whistlin' at Bridgeford. It'll be here in a minute, Honey, and then it won't be five minutes more till your train comes."

John Dalton's gaze, wandering from the pretty child to her ponies saw a tragedy being enacted. Jack, the wheel pony, was calmly and perfidiously stretching his neck and making a dainty meal off of Jill's rear decorations. John, always ready to help a child in trouble, shouted out of the car window,

"Hello! Peggy, look at Jack!"

The child, startled by the cry, looked first at him and saw a rugged face, brown with the suns of many harvest fields, and a hand sinewy from much acquaintance with plough-handle and axe, pointing to her ponies. She turned to look at Jack, who was at that moment tugging with his teeth at a particularly beautiful bunch of Jill's decorations, so securely fastened in the harness as to

successfully resist his pulls.

In a moment the child's face was transformed from angelic sweetness to rage. She ran, shrieking at Jack as she ran, and catching him by the head, soundly and deliberately and repeatedly, boxed first one ear and then the other. Her tiny hand could not have hurt the pony much, but none the less was it an exhibition of fury, and for some inexplicable reason it hurt John—she had seemed so like a little angel to him.

Whether the child felt his rebuking eyes or not, she suddenly glanced at him and as she met his gaze a painful wave of crimson swept over the little face and the golden head drooped—a picture of shame and repentance.

At that moment the great flyer thundered by, and as the long train went rolling on, John's own train began to move, and by the time the flyer had passed, they were so far beyond the station that a clump of bushes on a high bank hid station and ponies, and the pathetic drooping figure of the child.

Through the four years of his college life—years of struggle such as his soul delighted in, crowned by successes that but nerved him to renewed effort—John Dalton thought often of the drooping childish figure, and always with a vague regret that he had not been able to assure her with a smile of his restored respect.

But the four years were over, and knapsack on shoulder and a few dollars in his pocket, John turned his face to the great world with high-hearted courage. The few

dollars were the last of the little hoard that, eked out by the money earned in harvest fields through the long vacations, had carried him safely through the four years of college. Now there were no more harvest fields for him. Life must begin in earnest and at once, and not a cent of that little hoard should be wasted in railroad fare.

So a radiant morning in early June found him once more in the beautiful Florissant valley, tramping gaily along the white ribbon of road down which he had seen the strange little equipage come. Neither the brilliant gold of September fields nor the purple tassels of climbing corn outlined the white road to-day, but everywhere was the rich verdure of June, with garlands of wild rose flung over low stone walls and scarlet trumpet creepers drooping from oak and maple.

The spring of the year was in his veins. The song of the thrushes came down to him from high groves cresting the ridge above him, and his heart answered with a happier song. He was a soldier marching confidently to battle with his enemy the world, and in glorious visions he already beheld his foe beneath his feet. No soldier could have borne himself more proudly erect than he, his fine head with its close crop of dark brown curls held high, his grey eyes glowing with the fires of resolve and courage.

The road turned sharply at right angles; he glanced up at a sign-post and read, "Le Beau Way." Yes, he was on the right road. He was to follow Le Beau Way until, in its passage from one rich plantation to another, it had made four right-angled turns and entered the Natural

Bridge Rock Road leading straight to the great city. This was the fourth day of his long tramp and it would be his last. He was hardly more than fifteen miles from his goal; his steps quickened but could not keep pace with his eager thoughts.

He had been for some time passing the white fences that enclosed a great country place: first wide fields of grain, billowing in the light summer breeze; then rich pastures dotted with browsing Jerseys and blooded horses; a cluster of barns and stables and farm buildings; nearer the house, orchards and gardens; then a high osage hedge shutting in the stately trees and close cut turf of an extended lawn rolling gently upwards to where amid dense foliage he discovered the chimneys of a great house; and to himself he said—Just such a country place should be his own one day.

He was nearing an avenue of tall lindens leading up to the house. What impelled him at that moment to break into a rollicking college song, he did not know, but his yielding to the impulse came near to having disastrous results. The red gravel of the drive turned sharply into the white road of Le Beau Way, and around that steep turn came at this moment a tandem team, not of white Shetland ponies, but of small Indian horses bright bay in color. He looked quickly up, expecting to see the little child of four years before, but he had only time to note a tall slim girl of twelve or thirteen and a glory of red gold hair, when he saw that the horses, startled by the sudden sound of his voice, were plunging and rearing and threatening to upset the little cart on the steep turn.

As John sprang to the head of the leader, a girl's high treble voice rang out in shrill command:

"Let go that horse's head, Sir! Let go at *once*, I say! How *dare* you touch my horses!"

John, fearing for the girl's safety, did not let go, nor, until he had quieted the two plunging horses, did he look at their driver. Then he saw the child of four years before, grown a little older, and because he had not obeyed her command, she was bending on him much the same angry frown that had disfigured the beautiful face then, when it was the pony that had offended her.

Yet he saw something more than anger in the child's face, and it flashed into his mind that she was afraid of him; and her drawn brows and blazing eyes were but the childish expression of high-hearted courage that would not yield to fear. No doubt he looked like a tramp in his dusty clothes with his pack on his back. He looked up at her with a merry twinkle in his eye:

"I'm no tramp, Peggy, and you mustn't mind my stopping your horses since I started them."

John Dalton was nearly twenty-six years old—for he had been late in entering college since he must first earn his way—and a girl of twelve or thirteen was but the verie t child in his eyes, and he did not dream he was offering her any impertinence in calling her by her name. But the child was feeling the stirrings of the woman and would have resented such familiarity from any stranger, much more from one whom she judged from his clothes to be the creature she most despised and feared, a common tramp. Her first impulse was of hot indig-

nation, but fast on the heels of the indignation—quenching the scorn in her eyes—came a wonder that he should have known her name, and stealing after the wonder, a vague remembrance, gradually growing clearer, of just such kindly grey eyes beaming from under dark brown curls.

Four years of student life had worn off some of the tan from the rugged cheeks, and there had been lines in them four years before that were smoothed away to-day, but it was still the face that had haunted Peggy's childish dreams with an intolerable sense of shame, and once more the hot crimson flamed in her face and the golden head drooped.

The keen grey eyes had followed every changing emotion of the child's mind, and now he saw that she remembered.

"Why Peggy!" he cried, "I believe you know me! What's become of Jack and Jill? Does Jack still have to have his ears boxed?"

The child looked up at him shyly, still half-ashamed, but she could not withstand his gay good humor; she broke into a merry laugh.

"Oh," she said, "I was very angry that day and I have always been ashamed of it since—but he *was* funny, wasn't he, eating up Jill's flowers so calmly."

"Funny! he was screamingly funny! I've thought about you and Jack and Jill many a time off at college these four years."

"Have you been to college?" Peggy asked, looking at him wonderingly and half doubting. All her experi-

ence of college men was of fine clothes and elegant manners—he was not her idea of a college man.

"Yes," said John, "I've just finished, and now I'm off to tackle the world. I saw you the day I started for college and I believe it brought me good luck. I'm glad I met you again to-day when I'm just starting out to whip the world—you must be my mascot."

The child had forgotten her scorn of his dusty clothes and was regarding him with a bright look of interest in her blue eyes.

"Am I?" she asked with shy pleasure, "I know what a mascot is—I'll make you win your fight. But how will I know if you do win?"

"I'll come back some day and tell you," said John gaily. He liked children and especially he liked this one who belonged to a class he had only known in books and dreams.

"Will it be long?" asked Peggy still more pleased at his promise.

That sobered John for a minute.

"I can't tell little Peggy. I hope not very long."

"Perhaps I won't know you, or perhaps you won't know me." The child spoke wistfully for this was a fight she had a share in, and hers was a spirit that loved deeds of valor and she longed to know the result.

"Very likely you will forget me, little Peggy," said John, "but I would always know you by your golden locks like Criemhild's." And then he added, partly to please the child and partly from some feeling he did not stop to explain:

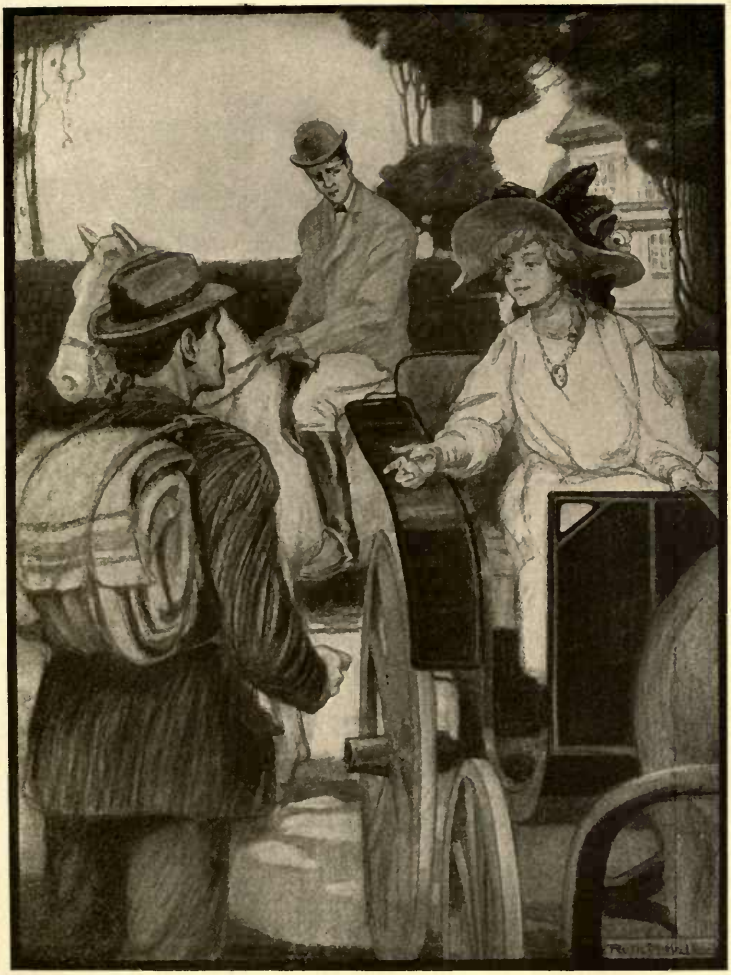
"I'll tell you what we'll do. You give me a tiny curl and I'll keep it till I come back, and if it's ever so many years and you've forgotten all about me, I'll show it to you and then you'll remember."

Peggy hesitated. She was not quite sure that was the right thing to do, but his eyes looked so kind and good it could not be very wrong. So she held out the tip of a shining spiral to John's ready pocket-knife and in a moment the wisp of gold lay in John's hand and with extravagant care he was depositing it inside of an old letter he had taken from his pocket.

"Now," said John soberly, "when I'm President of the United States and you're a beautiful young lady, and I come to call on you, and you say—"I do not know you, Sir," I'll show you the little curl and say—"Behold, Fair Lady, the golden talisman that has brought me wealth and renown!" What will you say then little Goldie-locks?"

But John saw from the child's shining eyes that she was taking him seriously and he threw back his head and broke into a jolly laugh; partly because it seemed to him a matter for laughter, but partly also that the child might know it was but jest. And after a moment of wondering regard, Peggy's merry ripple of laughter joined his.

Above the glossy leaves of the osage orange hedge, pricked the tips of a horse's ears, and around the steep turn of the drive came a rider. John's quick glance noted the slim elegance of the figure in high riding boots and breeches of latest fashion, and then noted also the



"The look of amazement on the rider's face changed quickly to a frown."

look of amazement on the rider's face change quickly to a frown at the sight of the child in merry parley with a strange man of rough and dusty aspect.

"Peggy!" he called sternly, "What does this mean? Why are you hob-nobbing with a tramp in this fashion?"

Now John liked not to be called a tramp at any time, and particularly he liked it not before the pretty child. He drew himself up quickly, lifted his hat and was about to say good bye, but Peggy's aspect stopped him. Her face was ablaze with generous indignation, and her voice was ringing.

"Peyton! how *dare* you speak so to one of my friends! He is no tramp; he is a college man like you and Mr. Kent!"

Then she turned quickly to John, fearing greatly that his feelings had been hurt by her brother's rudeness.

"You must excuse my brother, sir," she said with gentle dignity, "he does not understand. But I have been very much pleased to meet you again and I shall hope to see you when you are President." And with a gracious air well befitting a young duchess, she extended her hand.

Her brother was looking on with the frown growing deeper as she so boldly braved his displeasure. Not for a moment did he doubt that the man was a tramp who had deluded the child with some cock and bull story of being a gentleman and a scholar. But John was not to be outdone in courage by the girl. If she could brave her brother's wrath, then so could he. He took the extended hand.

"Good-bye Peggy," he said, "I shall not forget. *Auf wiedersehen!*"

He gently dropped her hand, took off his hat with a wide sweep, and without glancing toward her brother, into whose face a look of slow wonder, effacing the frown, had gradually crept, he turned and strode quickly up Le Beau Way; not once looking back until the next right-angled turn hid child and tandem and haughty rider from his sight. And so, on over the hard white ribbon of road beneath overhanging maples and lindens, until two more turns had brought him into the Natural Bridge Rock Road, winding over hill and through valley, a broad high-way to the great city fifteen miles away.

CHAPTER I.

AN INVITATION TO TEA

"Peyton, what do you say to spending the Fourth at the Fair?"

Peyton Le Beau looked up from the egg he was laboriously and anxiously decapitating. Nothing would have induced him to eat an egg in any other fashion, but early training and long years of practice had not made him skillful at it and it would probably, to the end of time, continue to be one of the most anxious moments of his day until he saw the neat white disk laid beside his egg cup, and no disfiguring yellow blotches on shell or plate. An ordinary remark would not have caused him to suspend the delicate operation; with a murmured "Pardon," he would have gone on to its completion, before replying.

But this was no ordinary remark. He laid down his knife deliberately—Peyton Le Beau even at the most intense moment could be nothing, if not deliberate—and regarded his sister curiously.

"What is it Margaret? You have been poring over the Herald for five minutes; is there some unusual Fourth of July attraction offered at the Fair?"

Margaret smiled. It was an inscrutable smile and her brother, who knew her well, was sure it concealed some hidden reason for this strange whim of hers. But she answered with apparent frankness:

"It's our first Fourth in town, and we ought to improve the opportunity to hear some Fourth of July speeches such as our forefathers listened to. I think I should enjoy a patriotic glow; I have not had a real heart-warming one since the Cuban war."

"It's the speeches, is it? And who is to speak, pray?"

Margaret hesitated for the fraction of a second, while she meditatively stirred her coffee. She answered carelessly between sips:

"Oh, a lot of Senators and Honorables I believe. I think I noticed Senator Brown was to speak, and—the Honorable John Dalton."

Her brother's egg was neatly decapitated; he leaned back in his chair and rested from his labors, while he surveyed his sister with an amused smile:

" 'Still harping on my daughter!' I wish you would tell me what there is in that back number that interests you so much."

It could hardly be said that Margaret bridled. She would never have permitted herself such a childish expression of annoyance, but nevertheless her brother was aware of a fleeting shadow crossing her face and vanishing in a pleasant smile.

"Am I always harping on him?" she asked amiably. "I believe I am, and I can't tell why I should be so interested in him. He is certainly not of our politics, and I know none of our friends approve of him; but ever since that great speech four years ago that carried the convention off its feet, he has seemed to me the one interesting figure in American politics. I believe it is because

he stands for something. He is fighting for a principle—for an issue at least—and no one else in either party seems to have any particular interest in anything but place and power."

Peyton Le Beau formed his lips for a soft whistle, but, remembering himself in time, refrained.

"Margaret," he said, "am I to believe that the cool-headed Miss Le Beau whose calm brain and cold heart have proved impregnable barriers to every suitor lo, these many years; am I to believe she has romantically idealized a man she has never seen? A man that his own party discredits now, and whom every one outside of his party believes to be a political demagogue and filibuster? I can hardly understand, either, how a blue-blooded Le Beau can take such interest in a man who smells so thoroughly of 'oî polloî.'"

Margaret's dainty chin was set in a fashion that her brother was in the habit of denominating obstinate, when he had not succeeded in changing her way of thinking to his, and her tones were of the even coolness that always made him feel vaguely uncomfortable:

"If it is romantic to admire a noble utterance when you hear it—or read it—then you may call me romantic if you like. And I hope that being a Le Beau does not necessarily mean such narrowness of soul as you intimate it does. I have often heard that most that is good and great comes out of the people."

"Yes," said her brother, with a whimsical sigh, "I believe my class oration expressed some such sentiments. But that was twenty years ago, and now that I am

an old fellow I've come to believe that there's nothing quite so comfortable as to stick to your own class in life—the well-groomed and well-mannered people who if they do not startle you with their originality, at least do not rub you the wrong way with their gaucheries."

"That's all very good logic" answered Margaret calmly, "Where one's friends are concerned—I quite agree with you. But this is not a case in kind. For four years I have greatly admired Mr. Dalton's utterances; now I have a chance to hear him for myself and I should be sorry to lose it, though I have no desire to make his acquaintance, for no doubt—"

What Margaret did not doubt did not appear, for the telephone had been ringing while she had been speaking and now a maid entered and announced that Mrs. Paxton would like to speak to Miss Le Beau.

Her brother followed her graceful figure as she crossed the room, with what his friends were wont to call his "adoring gaze." It was a standard joke with them,—Peyton's adoration of his beautiful sister,—and there were those who let it account for his prolonged bachelor state. No doubt the fact that they two had been left alone in the world when Margaret was but a child, requiring much of his care and thought, had had something to do with it. As she grew older, his pride was satisfied by her beauty and accomplishments; and the charm of her companionship and the ease and grace with which she presided over their home, prevented his feeling any void in his life that demanded filling. He was wont to

say, "When Margaret marries I will begin to look for a wife."

But much to the surprise of society in general Margaret did not marry. There had been no lack of suitors, as her brother had said, but she had gone on her way serenely untouched by their ardent vows, liking them all but loving none. Of course society had offered many explanations for this state of affairs, some of them amiable, some otherwise, but had settled down to a final conviction that either Margaret Le Beau was cold of heart and preferred to reign over many rather than rule in the affections of one, or that she was secretly as devoted to her brother as he was openly to her, and found their home life together as perfectly satisfying as he found it.

Be that as it may, all agreed that Margaret had emancipated herself. Society no longer tyrannized over her, driving her to a weary round of receptions, luncheons, balls and dinners. She used society now for her own pleasure, accepting such invitations as pleased her, and finding a way to decline others without giving offense. She was nearing the fateful line of thirty years. Perilously near, the gossips said, for that line once crossed meant confirmed spinsterhood, than which there could be no fate more awful to their frivolous minds. Delightfully near, said the few wise souls who know that the most charming years of a woman's life lie in that summer land between thirty and forty, when all the crudenesses and immaturities which we forgive to the very young, but cannot admire, have vanished, and every beauty and

every grace has rounded and ripened to an exquisite perfection.

Some such thoughts as these flashed into Peyton's mind as his sister returned, and took her place opposite him at the round table, behind the massive silver tray bearing the old fashioned coffee service used by many generations of Le Beaus. A bowl of late roses and honeysuckles in the center of the table mingled their perfume with the fragrance of mocha. Through the open windows the fresh morning air brought the scents and sounds of summer: the odor of newly cut grass, the song of the meadow lark, the cool plash of the fountain in its basin. Margaret in her dainty breakfast gown of soft white muslin and lace, with a knot of pale blue ribbon at her throat, the morning sun turning the deep bronze waves of her hair to red gold, was good to look at. Peyton sighed unconsciously with a delicious sense of well-being, then caught himself at it and looked up with a smile:—

"Well?" he asked, "What did Mrs. Paxton want?"

"She invites us both to tea at the New York building this afternoon at five. I accepted for you without consulting you, for I knew if we were out at the Fair listening to the speeches it would be most convenient."

Peyton smiled again:

"So you are determined to hear the speeches? Well, I suppose I'm in for it, and I detest political speeches. That's what comes of being a 'hen-pecked brother,' as Hugh Kent called me."

"Did Hugh Kent call you that?" sharply.

Peyton hastened to avert the impending storm from his friend's head.

"Come to think of it, it wasn't Hugh, it was one of the men at the club the other night, when he wanted me to take a hand at bridge, and I excused myself on the plea of an engagement with you."

"I don't care if it was not Hugh," said Margaret, easily mollified, "but it was not a particularly courteous speech whoever made it; I hope you resented it properly."

"Oh you may be sure I did, for the sake of my own reputation," answered Peyton laughing. "I said you *didn't* rule me with a rod of iron and you *weren't* the most exacting woman in the world, and I *wasn't* tied to your apron strings, and a lot more lies of the same kind."

Margaret laughed too, and then said suddenly.

"By the way, Mrs. Paxton said she would have a surprise for me this afternoon at tea; what do you suppose it is?"

"Probably some duke or earl she wants to present to you—there are a lot of titles around, these Fair times. Or, I shouldn't wonder if it were the Honorable John Dalton himself; how would you like that?

"I don't know," said Margaret slowly, with a little pucker between her straight brows, "I believe I would rather worship him at a distance."

CHAPTER II.

"WE'RE ALL GOOD PATRIOTS!"

The morning had been fair, but before noon the clouds gathered, and as Margaret and Peyton Le Beau left the Art Gallery—where they had dropped in for a moment to look at a picture they were thinking of buying—and started to walk down to the Monument, a sudden downpour drove them to take refuge in Festival Hall. Hundreds of others found refuge there also, and in a few moments a man on the platform announced that, owing to the rain, the speeches would be delivered there, instead of at the Monument as had originally been intended.

And so it happened that not twenty minutes later, Margaret sat with quickening pulse listening to the brief introductory speech, lauding to the skies the speaker of the hour, the Honorable John Dalton. She had not been able to distinguish him in the dark-coated throng sitting on the great platform, although she had a very distinct impression of how she expected him to look, formed from newspaper prints and caricatures: a sort of dashing Don Quixote type, flashingly dressed, no doubt, in the poor taste belonging to a man who had risen from the ranks, but with nevertheless a certain Bohemian grace and attractiveness.

It was almost a shock therefore, at the close of the speech of introduction, to see a middle-aged man quietly

step forward to the front of the platform, and survey his audience a moment in silence. She had not expected him to look so old, though she knew that no very young man could have taken the part in politics he had been taking the last four years. There was nothing dashing in the strong, lithe figure, lean and muscular, with broad shoulders bearing with ease the leonine head. The close crop of brown curls was already darkening to grey and beginning to whiten and to thin at the temples leaving a broad expanse of brow that had almost the effect of beetling over the keen grey eyes. The chin was square and massive and the lips well cut and firmly closed.

Neither was there anything at all flashy in the dress. Save for the little black tie, he might have been a country clergyman, in his easy-fitting black frock and black trousers, guiltless of a crease. Margaret was disappointed; there was nothing in this plain-looking country gentleman to encourage romantic idealization, and she began to recognize that in spite of her denial to her brother that was just what she had been guilty of.

The house was not more than two-thirds full, for comparatively few had learned of the change of place; or, having learned it, dared to brave the tremendous downpour of a July thunder storm. Margaret thought this was no doubt a disappointment to the speaker but nothing in his manner indicated it. After a moment's survey of his audience a half-smile illuminated his face, transfiguring it to the face of a poet and a seer, and draw-

ing Margaret's interest at once with a powerful magnetism.

Then he began to speak. This was no political harangue, but a scholarly and patriotic oration suited to the commemoration of a great nation's birthday. It was an immense hall he was speaking in; the voice of the man who introduced him had, with evident effort, made itself heard as far as Margaret's seat in the balcony, but there was no apparent effort in the way the silvery tones of this speaker penetrated to every seat under the vast dome. Margaret listened, so fascinated by the sound that for a time she hardly took in the sense. It was like some great master playing on a beautiful instrument, and arousing in his listeners every emotion at his will.

When she began to really comprehend what he was saying, she was sorry at first that this was not to be a political speech; she would have liked to hear him on those issues for which he had been making such a gallant fight the last four years—a fight that had kindled her admiration. But as she listened, she was impressed more and more by the brilliant scholarship of the man, and she began to perceive that this was one of those wonderful flights of finished oratory which it is given one to hear hardly more than once in a lifetime. It struck her, too, that it was an unusual evidence of self-restraint and good taste not to have siezed this occasion, on the eve of the great convention, to make political capital for himself and his views. Surely the man was something more than a "political demagogue" as her brother had called him.

She had been feeling very sensitive as to the impression the Honorable John Dalton should make upon her brother. She recognized this with something like self-derision, saying to herself it was no affair of hers, and it was extremely silly of her to feel any concern. None the less she experienced a great relaxing of tension, and a disposition to settle back comfortably in her seat, when she discovered from cautious side-glances that her brother was every moment growing more deeply interested; his eyes glowing and his face, usually an impenetrable mask of indifference, kindling with enthusiasm.

But the speaker had not gone far into his subject—hardly more than well introduced it—when a distant sound struck upon Margaret's ears. It grew rapidly louder and nearer. It was the hurried trampling of many feet—hundreds of them, thousands of them—it was some strange and awful panic!

The noise grew to a deafening roar; the speaker's voice was drowned and he was obliged to stop. No one knew what it meant; every one looked uneasily back towards the doors, and many women half rose in their seats as if to flee. She could see that her brother was anxious, but when she turned to him and said—"Let us go, I am afraid"—he quieted her with—"No, wait and let us see; it is nothing, I think."

It seemed a long time that the terrifying rush and roar of tramping feet kept up, steadily growing louder, but not yet entering the doors. Then at last they came: hundreds of them, thousands of them, eager-eyed, pouring through the doors and rushing down the aisles, alike

of main floor and balcony, in a mad race for place to see and hear the speaker. They swept past Margaret a resistless throng, and she saw now the wisdom of her brother's advice to keep quiet—no one could for a moment have breasted that rushing tide.

Her soul was thrilled at the sight of them, for their faces were illuminated with their great desire, and they were strong, stern faces, browned by the suns of harvests, roughened by the winds of winter. Most of them were young men, but some of them were middle-aged and a few were grey-haired. Margaret recognized at once that they were neither the sleek-faced town-bred youths from offices and stores, nor the unwholesome looking dwellers in the city's slums. They were the farmers and the farmer lads from the great West and South, roughly clad, but neat of garb, self respecting, with an independence of bearing born of life in the free air under wide skies.

There was a blockade in the aisle for a moment. Margaret looked up into the eager face of a young man by her side, straining anxiously forward towards the speaker standing on the platform with his luminous smile, quietly waiting for the struggling mass to calm itself.

A sudden impulse moved Margaret:—

"Who are you?" she asked, "and where did you come from in such multitudes?"

The man withdrew his gaze from the platform, half impatiently; but as he looked down and caught Margaret's bright glance, his face cleared and he answered pleasantly:

"We've come from the Monument, where we just heard the speaking was to be changed to the hall. Ran all the way." And then with sudden ardor:

"We're all good patriots come to hear Dalton!"

The blockade gave way and the man passed on, with his eager gaze once more bent on the platform, while Margaret sat tingling to her finger tips with the contagious fire that had leaped from the countryman's eyes to hers at his ardent words—

"We're all good patriots!"

CHAPTER III.

AN ENTERING WEDGE

Margaret and her brother did not wait to hear the next speaker. The sudden downpour of rain had ceased. Dripping foliage and flowers flashed in the brilliant July sun like coroneted ladies; the hot dry world of noon was fresh and young again.

It was four o clock; they were not due at the New York building until five. They walked down between the cascades slipping in deep green masses over the stone terraces and falling with thunderous sound into the basins below, and stood a moment on the lower terrace where the spray from the leaping fountains drifted over them.

"We've an hour at our disposal," said Peyton, "what would you like to do?"

But Margaret was prevented from answering by the appearance at her side of a man in riding breeches and boots; it startled her for a moment, the thunder of the waters having drowned the sound of approaching footsteps. He hardly waited for the exchange of greetings to say eagerly:

"I'll answer Peyton's question for you, Margaret. You're going to my sister's tea I take it?"

"Yes, are you?" glancing dubiously at the riding-dress.

"Oh, Hugh's a law unto himself" interposed Peyton hastily, "Besides all things are forgiven to a country squire."

"And everything is permissible in Fair time," added Hugh good-humoredly. "I am riding back to Kentwick immediately after tea, so Helen graciously consents to receive me in riding togs. But I haven't answered Peyton's question—we'll take a gondola for an hour, if you two say so. And we're in luck! Here comes the nicest little boat on the lagoons and the best gondolier, and only one passenger, who I can see by his face intends to get out at this landing and go up to hear the speeches."

Hugh read the passenger's face aright—he alighted at their landing, and Lorenzo the gondolier, picturesque in sailor garb of white, and resplendent in tie and sash of crimson silk, eagerly claimed Hugh and his party as his "famiglia."

Margaret sank back luxuriously in the one comfortable seat of the gondola with a rapturous sigh.

"Now for an hour of Venice—it's the one thing at the Fair I never tire of."

The two men facing her let their eyes rest with equal delight on the picture she made, a fluff of filmy white and pale heliotrope—Hugh's gaze almost as openly adoring as Peyton's.

Margaret always objected to her brother's too open admiration in public, and a little pucker between the straight brows brought him to his senses now. He saved himself by teasing her:

"Did you ever observe, Hugh, that Margaret's eyes

always take on the color of her gown? She has on her lavender eyes to-day."

"Lavender!" echoed Margaret scornfully. "Mr. Kent please defend me from my brother's compliments!"

Hugh, who was only a year or two younger than Peyton, was still but a boy in heart; he answered quite seriously:

"Aren't they lavender, Margaret? I don't know colors, I only know they're all right."

"Thank you," said Margaret amiably—she was as used to Hugh's admiration as to Peyton's, and minded it almost as little. "Now if you please, we'll enjoy ourselves. See that arch of the La Salle bridge we are just coming to, and the grass and the trees showing vivid emerald against the ivory of the facade beyond, with its Corinthian pillars and sculptured frieze and pediment: could anything in Venice be finer?"

"Not half so fine!" responded Peyton promptly. "Look up on the other side to that green hill, flower-embroidered, crowned with its mighty dome with the wonderful colonade of heroic sculptures circling away from it on either side; and the green torrent of water pouring down the center; and the broad curving steps rising on each side of it; and the great Grecian urns filled with flowers and vines on their wonderfully carved balustrades; and the people of every nation on the earth thronging up and down the steps. There's not on all the inhabitable globe a sight to equal it!"

Peyton spoke eloquently, and his two listeners were silent for a moment. Then Margaret said:

"That sounds a bit grandiloquent for the impassive Mr. Le Beau, but it's all true. Oh, if it were only marble or enduring stone!" regretfully. "If we could only come out here next summer and find it just the same! It makes me sad to think of next summer and the destruction of all this wonderful beauty."

"Do you know Margaret," said Hugh simply, "it always makes me sad to look ahead a year. I'm always wondering who'll be dead and who'll be married."

Margaret laughed

"Why do you class them together, Hugh? Marriage isn't as sad as death, is it?"

"That depends," said Hugh soberly with a half-sigh, and neither Margaret nor Peyton would laugh at his lugubrious face, much as they might like to, for they both knew it was of Margaret's possible marriage he was thinking. He had almost ceased to hope for himself, but as long as the successful suitor stayed away, he could at least find the comfort of frequent companionship. He had been Margaret's devoted slave from her babyhood; she was fond of him and was always sorry for him, and always wishing she could get him on to the simple plane of good fellowship. So she answered brightly.

"Well, we three are likely to go on in the same old way for years to come. You and Peyton are confirmed bachelors, and I see no hope for me. In another year I'll be thirty, you know, and then—spinsterhood!"

"I'd like to think it," said Hugh shaking his head, and then, as if remembering he was being rather a death's head, he changed the subject abruptly—

"When are you two people coming out to Kentwick?"

"Oh, I can't get Margaret to budge from town until after the convention" answered Peyton ruefully—"I don't care a fig for political conventions myself, but we've had a box given us and Margaret is crazy about Dalton, you know."

"By the way, how did you like him? I saw you in the hall."

Margaret listened keenly for the answer. She had not asked it herself, partly because of a curious self-consciousness that would not let her appear too eager, partly from as curious a sense of fear that the verdict might not be pleasant to hear.

Peyton answered slowly as one weighing his words:

"I hardly know what to think. The man knocked out all my preconceived notions of him. I can only say he's an orator from start to finish, and tremendously clever. Nothing could have been cleverer than the way he avoided every political issue. He was not going to commit himself on the eve of the convention."

"Do you think he's after the nomination?"

"There's no doubt about it!"

"Do you think he'll get it?"

"That's another question. I should hardly think so. His party seems to be struggling to cut itself loose from all the crazy issues that defeated it four years ago, and if it succeeds—Dalton's got to go."

"What did you think of the interruption in the midst of his speech—that tremendous rush of farmer boys?"

"Stagey, but effective; and no doubt carefully pre-arranged."

"Peyton! That's unworthy of you!" flamed Margaret hotly. She had been silent till this moment, but now she entered the lists like one riding a charger at full tilt. And so exciting was the tournament of argument that followed, Peyton cool, with an amused smile provoking Margaret to still fiercer onslaughts; Hugh gallantly doing his best to squire Margaret, even, occasionally, at the expense of his convictions, that none of the three noted the lapse of time, and after all they were late to Mrs. Paxton's tea.

The Honorable John Dalton walked across to the New York building talking earnestly to Mr. Frank Seton. People who knew Mr. Seton slightly, knew him only as Mr. Dalton's political henchman. Those who knew him better, believed him to be a straightforward honest politician—not so much of an anomaly as it sounds—devoted soul and body and fortune (which was not small) to the support of Dalton and his views.

Mr. Seton was not invited to the tea. At the entrance to the New York building they stopped a moment for a last word and then parted with a hand shake, and what sounded like a command from Dalton:

"I shall expect you in my room at the hotel at seven."

Mr. Dalton was not fond of society, and especially did he care but little for that form of it to be found around an afternoon tea-table. Not that he was a recluse, far

from it; but he used society much as Margaret used it, discriminating in his acceptance of invitations, and especially discriminating against all such "ladies' functions" as afternoon teas.

None the less he was looking forward to this one with some pleasurable excitement. He was in many ways the same John Dalton who as a young man had set before himself many purposes to accomplish, many goals to be won—a college education, success at the bar, wealth, honor, renown—and he had won them all. It was in this city that he had made his start in life; but a few discouraging months had led him to accept a promising opening in the West, and except for fleeting visits on pressing business he had never returned to it. For the first time he was staying there for more than a day or two, and for the first time he was receiving there any social attentions. It was the remembrance of the youth's forlorn life in those early days in this very city, and his secret ambition to one day be at home in that society of which he had caught a glimpse on his way to college, that gave him the little touch of excitement to be to-day entering it. Not that the youth's ambitions had lasted into later manhood—he smiled at them in recalling them, as belonging to the immaturity and the ignorance of youth, looking back with some pardonable pride at the nobler ambitions that the unfolding years had presented to him, most of which his indomitable will and steadfastness of purpose had achieved.

He found Mrs. Paxton waiting for him in the cool green parlors of the New York building, with a group of charm-

ing women surrounding her. There were also in the group a foreign ambassador and two or three foreign commissioners, among them the Chinese—who since his advent in the early spring had made himself very popular in society—and they all received John with such deference as is due a man of note, and which must have been pleasing to his vanity, if he had any.

Mrs. Paxton interrupted the little buzz of conversation following the introductions:

"We will not wait for the others. I don't know why they are late, they are usually very prompt people, but they will know where to find us," and led the way out to the piazza where under gaily striped awnings the tea table was set.

Under the shade of the awnings soft little breezes stirred palms and brilliant flowering plants in great urns; cooling drinks and ices, temptingly displayed on the pretty tea table, offered to lower the temperature of the inner man; the women in flower hats and diaphonous muslins looked as if no tropic heat could disturb their dainty calm, and even the men in light flannels and the half negligee permitted to men in summer seemed not to mind a July thermometer ranging far up into the nineties. Only the Honorable John Dalton looked and felt uncomfortably warm. After the foolish manner of many men his dress was but a little lighter than it would have been had the thermometer stood at zero, and nothing could have looked hotter than his uncompromising black frock and trousers.

But when his hostess had placed him on her left—the

seat of honor was necessarily reserved for the foreign ambassador—and by a cleverly turned compliment on his speech of the afternoon had set her guests an example that they all hastened to follow, even the foreign ambassador and the commissioners seriously doing their best in their halting English, he began to grow more at ease—for after all his heat was largely internal rather than external.

"Your countrymen make much noise" said the lively Chinese commissioner, "that mean they like you?"

"I hope so," said John smiling, "but you can't always tell. Sometimes they do it just because they like the noise."

"There was no mistaking their meaning today" said the ambassador with stately courtesy.

"No, no!" they all chimed in, "it was an ovation!"

"Who were all those men that rushed in in the middle of your speech? I was dying to know but no one could tell me" asked the charming woman sitting next to the ambassador. But before John had time to reply a piquante little brunette from the end of the table—not so young perhaps as she looked, but with an assumption of extreme youth in voice and manner—piped up:

"Oh, I know—Mr. Sinclair told me—they were *rooters*. What are rooters, Mr. Dalton?"

Blank dismay on the face of his hostess and the other women for a moment, then John threw back his head and laughed his old, jolly, ringing laugh, in which gradually the others joined from the very infection of his hearty mirth, though the foreigners did little more than smile—

polite but puzzled—since "rooters" conveyed no meaning to their un-American ears.

"Oh Julie, Julie, will you never grow up!" gasped her hostess between peals of laughter.

Julie pouted—childlike, but sweetly cross:

"What have I said now? It is very unkind of you to make fun of me! Oh Mr. Le Beau," as the belated party of three made its appearance at that moment, "Please come here and help me—they're all laughing at me and won't tell me why."

"Wait a moment, Julie," Peyton called gaily to her, "until I speak to my hostess, then I'll come to your rescue—nobody shall abuse you."

There was a little commotion of introductions, handshakings between the men and the clicking of heels and stiff military bows as the foreigners were presented to Margaret.

The Honorable John Dalton felt himself a little awkward and a little self-conscious in getting to his feet and making his bow. It was his usual experience in meeting women, for he had not seen enough of them in his busy life to get used to them. His life had been esssentially a man's life. He sometimes wondered curiously whether Fate had decreed there should be no woman in the world for him, or had simply forgotten him. Not that in his scheme of life any part was alloted to Fate; in all its ordinary events it had been his own keen blade in his own strong right hand that he had relied on for carving out his destiny, and he had been so absorbed in

carving and climbing as to have found little time and little inclination for other thoughts.

At sight of Margaret, some sleeping memory of his youth stirred faintly—then he glanced at her brother and recognized him at once. Except that he had grown older, he was little changed from the man who had given him such a disagreeable impression of the arrogance of the upper class, and he turned quickly to Margaret again. It all came vividly back to him—two distinct pictures—the child and her flower-decked ponies, and the young girl generously braving her brother's displeasure for him.

To his eyes she seemed but little older than she had seemed then, for the hurry of her walk from the lagoons had set her eyes to dancing and her cheeks to glowing like a child's, and the white frock, short enough to disclose immaculate white shoes, accentuated the look of youth. The moist heat of the day had set loose little curling wisps of hair about her face—not the bright locks of the child, the red gold had deepened to bronze—and the rose tints of her cheek, the tawny gold of her hair, the floating heliotrope of her veil and the fluffs of her soft white gown, all blurred together in his eyes in one confused vision of loveliness.

He made a quick mental estimate of the other man with her, and classified him quite accurately as a simple-minded gentleman, whose honest blue eyes and frank friendly manners would make him a popular fellow in society but "not greatly to be feared," he said to himself and then wondered what he meant by that.

As for Margaret, she had half expected to see him and

was hardly surprised, though, fresh from the exaltation due to his eloquence and her own ardent defense of him, it was rather a rude awakening to find him awkwardly acknowledging his presentation to her, while a deep flush of embarrassment reddened his cheek. He did not shine in comparison with the sleek elegance of the other men, and she said swiftly to herself—"I would rather have known him at a distance."

It annoyed her also to catch the gleam of amusement in the eyes of both her brother and her hostess as they watched the meeting, and annoyed her still more to discover that a chair had been pointedly left vacant for her beside him.

It was not a promising beginning to the acquaintance, and John—sensitive to a fault where a beautiful woman was concerned, and for some reason more than ordinarily sensitive with this one—recognized it at once, but with his usual grim determination, resolved to win victory out of defeat. Margaret little knew it, but at the very moment she was taking her seat, a definite plan of attack to capture the citadel of her friendly regard, distinctly outlined itself in the mind of the man clumsily holding her chair for her.

"It's all Mr. Dalton's fault that we are so late, Mrs. Paxton," called Peyton from his seat at the other end of the table beside Julie Delauney, "ask Margaret if it isn't."

"Not at all," answered Margaret, flushing a little as every one turned inquiring eyes towards her. "Mr. Dalton had nothing to do with it, farther than to suggest

some question in politics that we grew so eager in discussing as to forget the time."

John turned to her quickly:—

"Tell me what it was, Miss Le Beau, and which side you were on. I am rather interested to hear your political views."

"Yes, Miss Le Beau if you please," urged the ambassador, "I am greatly interested in American politics, and particularly in Mr. Dalton's side of them."

"Oh, ask my brother, please," said Margaret, including both men in her smile and glance, "I don't believe I'm enough of a politician to state it clearly."

"I would rather hear your statement of it" insisted John, beaming down upon her in quite paternal fashion, for at her smile, time and place had suddenly been annihilated, and she seemed to him the child of long ago driving her tandem ponies. "I have discovered, Mr. Le Beau," making courteous excuse to Peyton, "that if we listen to the ladies we can usually get some new ideas; it's always the same old thing with us men."

"Oh don't think it necessary to apologize," said Peyton laughing, "I'm always glad to have Margaret do my talking. And as for a woman's political ideas, I grant you their novelty at least."

"Peyton! Mr. Dalton, he's a scoffer! don't listen to him, please," said Mrs. Paxton severely. "Margaret, prove that a woman can make an intelligent statement of a political question and shame your brother."

"But I'm not sure that I can. I'm not sure that I quite know what our hot discussion was over."

Hugh, who took everyone at his word, undertook to jog Margaret's memory:

"Why, you know Margaret, we were discussing the two parties—which one was the conservative party"—and then stopped short as he saw a shadow of annoyance on Margaret's face, for blunder as he might, he was always keenly alive and sensitive to every changing expression of that face.

Peyton saw the annoyance too, and thought he understood it, and, considerate brother that he was, shifted the burden to his own shoulders:

"My sister claims, Mr. Dalton, that your party is the conservative one, because you stand by the old constitution and oppose every amendment to it. And I insist that our party is the conservative one, for though we have been responsible for all the changes in the constitution, yet for the last fifty years our aims have been unchanged, and our platforms have differed so little from one four years to another, that we might almost have made the platform of fifty years ago serve at the convention this summer. The issues of our party fifty years ago, are its issues to-day."

"And I suppose you told her, also, what I have often heard charged against us," said Mr. Dalton quietly, "that we shift our platform with every new convention, hoping thereby to introduce some plank that may catch votes."

Peyton tried to interpose a polite demurrer, but with the habit of a platform speaker, having once secured the floor, John did not easily give it up.

"Of course," he said, "we deny that to be our object in changing our platform; but we can hardly deny that we are more radical than you. It is for each one to decide for himself which term seems to him the nobler—radical or conservative. For me, I would rather be the sails that impel the Ship of State forward, no matter how stormy the seas, than the anchor that holds her safe in harbor."

The Chinese commissioner was enjoying what, to his oriental ideas, seemed a delightfully dangerous flirtation with his pretty neighbor on the left, although to the young American lady herself it seemed an extremely innocent one. The Frenchman was having a treat—Julie Delauney was chattering to him in French as fluent as his own, if not as faultless. Neither of these two men cared for American politics as compared with American women. But the ambassador was, as he said, deeply interested; and no man on the American stage had interested him so strongly as John Dalton. He was not going to waste this opportunity of drawing him out.

"Your simile is a fine one, Sir," he said, "and as true as it is fine, but would you be so good as to tell me some of the—*boards*, I think Mr. Le Beau called them—that you have changed so often?"

Mr. Dalton hesitated for a perceptible moment, while Hugh muttered under his breath to the young lady at his side:

"Ah, say now, that's not quite fair you know."

Then with the quick flicker of an eyelid, and the smile

that so wonderfully illuminated his strong face, John answered:

"I'm afraid Mr. Le Beau would say 'Time would fail,' but I think it likely the plank he had most in mind, the one which has aroused the strongest opposition, in the party and out, is the anti-trust plank of the platform four years ago."

"And which I understand is to be eliminated from the platform at the coming convention," said Peyton quickly.

"That remains to be seen," answered Dalton grimly, and as he spoke, his grey eyes, usually so kindly, looked hard and cold, his strong jaw set itself more firmly, and unconsciously his head lifted a little and his shoulders straightened, as one squaring himself for conflict.

Mrs. Paxton thought it time to drop politics, and being a clever woman she soon had Dalton and the ambassador as deeply absorbed in a critical discussion of a newly discovered Pompeiian fresco as they had threatened to be in politics, while she and Margaret listened, and volunteered an occasional word.

Julie Delauney, discovering that Peyton was no longer engrossed by the party at the head of the table, threw the Frenchman over incontinently, and pounced upon Peyton the moment he was free with such lightning-like swiftness, she might have been suspected of watching for this opportunity. The Frenchman consoled himself with the lady on his left, who up to this time had been somewhat neglected, and so all around the table

was the pleasant murmur of light talk and laughter, as the shadows lengthened on the grass, and a cool little evening breeze sprang up in the leaves of the tall lindens and maples clustered close about the building, while throngs of tired, dusty sightseers trooping past on their way to the nearest gate, intent on home and supper, looked up with weary eyes at the merry party on the shady piazza, envying their cool and dainty ease.

Margaret was the first to rise, pleading a dinner engagement as excuse for breaking up such a delightful party. Under cover of the confusion of farewells, John managed to say what he had been conning over to himself through the whole hour:

"Miss Le Beau, I have to thank you twice—first for a large part of the pleasure of this afternoon, and second for something I cannot now tell you, but which I hope some day to be able to reveal to you; when I know you sufficiently well." Leaving Margaret in a state of doubt as to whether to be more amused by the set formality of his speech, or annoyed at its audacity; but leaving her also with an oft recurring wonder as to what the revelation might be.

Which was no doubt John's clever design in making the speech.

CHAPTER IV.

ELECTIONEERING

Margaret's dinner party was a large and formal one, given to the ambassador at one of the clubs. Most of those who had taken tea with Mrs. Paxton were also present at the dinner, but this time Peyton found himself next to Mrs. Paxton, and Margaret sat between the ambassador and a young German secretary of legation, whose attentions, Margaret very soon discovered, she must share with a blonde moustache, zealously trained upward in filial compliment to his sovereign, but still so young as to need much of his fostering care—which left her at liberty to enjoy the ambassador with a good conscience.

Hugh, who had had scarcely more than time after his sister's tea to gallop out to Kentwick, change his dress and catch a train back, had been assigned to Julie Delauney—an arrangement pleasing to neither of them; for Julie frankly called Hugh "stupid," and Hugh privately regarded Julie as "silly." Each one, however, was finding some consolation in the neighbor on the other side, which in Julie's case happened to be the Chinese commissioner, much to that gay oriental's delight. She was not as fluent with her Chinese as with her French, but she was amusing herself and delighting him, by making him give her the Chinese for many tender phrases, which

she repeated after him with a mixture of child-like innocence and languishing intention as quite ravished the inflamable organ he called his heart.

Peyton, for once, was so absorbed in his dinner partner that he had but few admiring glances to bestow on Margaret, though she had never deserved them more. She was wearing the shade of pale blue that made her eyes like sapphires and brought out every tint of gold in her hair and rose in her cheeks. Sparkling and glowing she made one think of stars and roses, and no man could look at her without his own eyes growing brighter. Even the dignified ambassador thawed under her radiance, and his old eyes shone as he looked at her with something of the fire of his youth, while Hugh scarcely dared to glance in her direction, since he wished to keep himself sufficiently undazzled to do his duty as a dinner guest.

It was a polyglot dinner: a mingling of German, French, Italian and English, some of the English sufficiently quaint, as no doubt were some of the foreign tongues, which the young American women were essaying to speak with ease. And it was not only many-tongued but of all ages, from stately matrons of fifty down to a last winter's debutante; though its mingled characteristics only seemed to add to its ease and gaiety, and for an hour or two the joyous flow of bright speech and merry laughter went steadily on.

But summer evenings were never made for long dinners, hot with the fumes of wine and the glow of many candles. By ten o'clock, when the dinner had progressed to cigars and coffee, the heat in the brilliantly lighted

room had become oppressive, and the lovely moonlight flooding the broad boulevard was calling the younger men and girls to their rightful heritage on summer nights.

"What do you say, Mrs. Thorndyke, to our all going down to The Southern to see the politicians? They're all in town now—the big ones at least—and it will be a lot of fun to see them and watch the electioneering."

It was a young June graduate who spoke—lifting his voice to address his hostess—so fresh from college that he was still full of the collegian's intense interest in life, and, most of all, in politics.

"Oh lovely! please do, Mrs. Thorndyke!" seconded the debutante, clapping her hands in schoolgirlish delight.

While Mrs. Thorndyke hesitated, embarrassed by the feeling that she could not so summarily break up her own dinner party without being sure all her guests desired it, Hugh glanced at Margaret. She returned his glance with dancing eyes and a little nod which Hugh interpreted—"Speak for me."

"It's all right, you know, Mrs. Thorndyke," said Hugh in obedience to the nod, "it's the thing to do. You'll find everybody you know there or at the other hotels."

"And do let us send the carriages home and all go down on the street car," added Julie Delauney, hands clasped dramatically on her breast, and as schoolgirlish an air of entreaty as the debutante's.

"It would be delightful," said Mrs. Thorndyke slowly, "but I'm afraid I can't go."

"Oh! who will chaperone us then!" Julie spoke with a dismay that seemed to Hugh like affectation, and irri-

tated him to unwonted sarcasm. He spoke in a low aside to Julie; but laughingly, to veil his ill-humor:

"Oh, we'll all chaperone you and the Bud, the rest of us are old enough to take care of ourselves."

He was sorry the moment he had spoken—it was not at all like "Gentlemanly Hugh." Julie colored, but whether with annoyance or pleasure at being classed with the Bud, it was difficult to tell. She did not turn her entreating eyes from her hostess.

"But can we go down to the hotels in dinner dress?" asked Mrs. Paxton in soft perplexity, as one not desiring to throw cold water, but seeing no help for it.

"Oh, I think it won't matter," answered Margaret quickly. "On summer evenings, you know, the whole town's practically in evening dress. If we wear something over our shoulders we will look like everybody else." And then at last the ambassador spoke, and relieved Mrs. Thorndyke's embarrassment.

"I would like much to be of your party, Madame, but I leave for Washington at midnight, and there are matters of importance to be attended to first. I must ask your permission to make my adieux now."

That brought the dinner to a close at once, and when the elaborate interchange of compliments and farewells between the hostess and the ambassador and the other guests was over, there was no reason why any one who wished should not join the party to The Southern.

They adopted Julie's idea of dismissing the carriages and going down on the street cars as "much more fun," as well as more expeditious. Whether Julie managed it

—she was clever enough to do so—or whether it was a kindly fate, she found herself next to Peyton, who liked her in spite of her affectations, which did not irritate him as they did Hugh, only amused him. He always treated her as of extreme youth, which was what she liked. Now he said:—

"You minx! You always get your own way. Now I wanted to go down in the carriages. I'm much too old a fellow to be standing around waiting for cars at midnight."

"Oh, it was all very well for you, Mr. Le Beau," Julie pouted, "Mrs. Paxton and Hugh came down with you and Margaret in your carriage, didn't they? But think of poor me sitting up in solitary state with my maid!"

"You poor child," murmured Peyton with exaggerated sympathy, "I had forgotten your brotherless estate. I haven't the least doubt, though, you could have sent your maid home and filled up your carriage to suit yourself."

"I like this better"—with soft voice and glance that were both lost on Peyton.

The seats in the car held only two. Mrs. Paxton was in the seat directly behind with the young secretary of legation, and Peyton turned and looked at her with frank admiration in his eyes. She had spent most of the years of her widowhood abroad, and had only returned recently to her home. His open admiration was for the soft grey dinner dress she was wearing, and its effect on her madonna-like beauty. It was the first time he had seen her wear anything but black, and he had all the

ordinary man's distaste for "mourning" clothes. His glance and smile expressed to her his approbation. She understood him, and was a little pleased, but much more embarrassed. It is a serious ordeal for a sensitive woman to lay aside her widow's garb, and so seem to announce to the world that she has ceased to mourn, and if it were not for the almost insensible gradations from deepest black to mingled black and white, and so through greys and lilacs to the whole spectrum of fashionable toilets, many a woman would not have the courage to undertake it, but would go sable-clad all her days. Mrs. Paxton was feeling as "conspicuous" as though she were habited in flaming red; and so Peyton's approbation partly soothed her, as an assurance that she had done the right thing, but annoyed her more as proof that the change had been so evident.

Their party nearly filled the car—there had been plenty of vacant seats going down town at that hour—and the few other passengers were as gaily dressed as themselves—the ladies guiltless of any head covering. It was as Margaret said, the whole town was practically in evening dress on summer evenings, and this summer the Fair and the great convention had added to the universal gala spirit.

The swift rush up hill and down, through the cool evening air sent a strong breeze through the open car that swept away every vestige of the heat that had oppressed them indoors, and sent their exhilarated spirits to the highest point. Having the car so nearly to themselves, conversation became almost as general as at Mrs. Thorn-

dyke's dinner table, with the men moving from seat to seat and much talk and laughter of a more general nature than is usually permissible in a public vehicle. The few other passengers evidently did not criticise, but smiled indulgently, pleased at being admitted to what seemed to them an intimate glimpse of some of the city's well-known four hundred. But there were two who would have liked it a little less general—Julie, who was losing her planned-for tete-a-tete, and Hugh, who was ardently desiring one with Margaret.

There was no chance for either; not even when they left the car and walked a block or two across to The Southern, and still less when they had entered the great hotel, where all was a bewildering glare of lights and confusion of sounds. They stopped for a moment in the rotunda, watching the kaleidoscopic effect of the shifting groups of men, some of them just arriving, suit-case in hand, but most of them already domiciled and moving about intent on many schemes: men of the south, lank of limb, long-coated, broad hatted, and fierce mustachioed; men of the west, sturdy and bronzed, and bearded, in checked and striped business suits; men of the east, clean shaven, in light summer flannels, or evening dress, as though they had dined sumptuously and at leisure; but east, or west, or south, all alike eager-eyed and intent on the business of the hour, while bell boys and pages, bearing notes or cards and swelling with importance, darted in and out, weaving their way through the throng like swift-flying shuttles of the loom.

They too had to weave their way with some difficulty

through to the elevators, and so up to the first floor, where Hugh and the young graduate had preceeded them and secured luxurious seats close to the railing, where they could look down into the open rotunda and watch the panorama below.

The eager young collegian pointed out first one and then another celebrity in the great arm-chairs lined up against the wall—each surrounded by a dense circle of advisers, and receiving notes from the hands of excited bell-boys, and scribbling hasty replies.

"How do you know everybody and all about them?" asked Peyton curiously, when the young fellow had pointed out Jim Burton of New York and Bill McBride of Pennsylvania, and had had some clever stories to tell of each.

"Oh, we take an interest in such things at college, you know," answered the young fellow, modestly enough, though the sound of it was a bit conceited, "and we're always reading up about the big guns and telling one another all we know, and going to hear them when we can."

"Was I ever like that at twenty-two?" murmured Peyton in Mrs. Paxton's ear.

"Exactly!" she looked up and smiled brightly into his face bending toward her. "Don't you remember? It was an election year the summer you came home from Harvard, and you went wild over politics: you had no eyes or ears for anything else."

"I remember very well that I had plenty of eyes and ears for a girl of seventeen who bullied me dreadfully,

until she finally turned me down for good."

Peyton's tones were an almost inaudible murmur, but there was no doubt of their having reached the ears for which they were intended. There were all the unmistakeable signs of perfect comprehension—swiftly lowered eyes, quickly averted head, slowly rising color.

"Oh, Mr. Le Beau, *do* look at that Mr. McBride! There's a man actually holding on to him by his buttonhole, and he seems to be trying to pull away. I didn't suppose they *really* did it! I thought it was only a figure of speech."

It was a timely interruption, Helen Paxton thought, and was grateful for it, without for a moment supposing it to be premeditated. Peyton was not so grateful, but was quite positive Julie Delauney had seen the little by-play and "meddled" with intent. For the first time she began to appear to him in somewhat of the light in which she had always appeared to Hugh.

The corridor where they were seated was almost as thronged as the rotunda below. An endless stream of hurrying men tramped by them, and there was the constant opening and shutting of doors, giving them glimpses, through blue clouds of smoke, of interiors crowded with men in loud and excited discussion.

Most of these doors bore over them, on white canvas in large letters, the name of a state, and above or below the canvas, the name or the picture of some "favorite son." Over one of the doors was the name of Dalton's state and above, a very life-like picture of Dalton himself. A little further down the corridor was a canvas bearing the name

of the great state of New York, but neither above or below was either name or portrait of any favorite son. Margaret asked why that was, and as usual the collegian was ready with the reply.

"Oh, that will be one of the great fights of the convention. There are two big factions in New York, you know, and one of them wants Dalton, believing he is the real choice of the party, but Jim Burton and his faction will have none of him unless he will give up the trust plank. Burton 's certain the party can't carry New York with that plank in, and as New York goes, so goes the Union this year, they say. He'd rather have 'most any one than Dalton anyhow, but his state has the unit rule, so if Dalton will only give up the trusts, his faction will join the other and put him up for the state nominee."

"Do you think he'll do it?" Margaret asked, and listened for the answer with an anxiety that astonished herself.

"Oh, I don't know; there's a lot of different opinions about Dalton. Some people claim he's a time-server and will do anything to get the nomination; but I believe myself he's honest and has the courage of his convictions."

Down the corridor at the moment came one of the big "Bosses," red of face, puffing and steaming and blowing, a dozen men almost literally hanging on to his coat-skirts, and looking like nothing so much as like a panting little tug towing a fleet of barges up stream.

"Excuse me a moment, Miss Le Beau," the collegian exclaimed. "I am indebted to that man for my seat in

the convention, and this is my opportunity to thank him for it, and incidentally to get a chance to hear him speak." And the alert young fellow, his interest and curiosity as fresh as if he were still a Sophomore at Yale, darted away to intercept the tug and its fleet.

Margaret watched him, smiling; saw him stop the great man a moment in his labored progress; saw the quick frown of annoyance at being intercepted, change to a genial smile; and then saw him motion the young fellow to accompany him, as he resumed his progress towards a door farther down the corridor.

The collegian came back in a few minutes, laughing gaily—

"Well, I did it! and he didn't eat me up either, as I half expected him to. Wouldn't I like to tell our fellows how I met and talked with the great man! But say! that was his room he went into! I didn't go in, you know, I stopped at the door, but I counted one bed and seven cots, and a dozen men at least; and the room so thick with smoke you could cut it! How's that for a multi-millionaire!"

They were sitting near the door of one of the large parlors bearing the inscription "Credentials Committee," and at this moment the door opened, and clear above the din of many voices, Margaret heard the silvery tones that had sent her blood tingling in the afternoon. She looked up quickly. He was just coming through the door of the committee-room, a small knot of men about him, all apparently trying to talk at once, looking anxious, and, Margaret thought, disappointed. She could distinguish

nothing but a babble of sound mingling with the other babble all about her, until once more she heard distinctly the clear strong tones.

"I'm sorry, boys. I'll do all I can for you. You're right and you ought to be seated—it will be a disgrace to your state if you're not. I'll work for you and talk for you, but I can't go on the Credentials Committee. I *must* be on the Resolutions Committee."

They seemed to take it good-naturedly, in spite of their evident disappointment, as they stopped a moment near her for a few last words, Dalton sending them off with a genial smile and hand-clasp for each. One man only was left with him, and the two turned to walk down the corridor towards Margaret's party.

In the act of turning, Dalton caught sight of Margaret, and his face flashed instant recognition and pleasure. She had been caught looking at him and it embarrassed her slightly, so that she returned his eager bow more coldly than she might have done, but it did not daunt him in the least; or if it did, he did not let it be seen. He turned to the man beside him and spoke with lowered voice, but not so low but that Margaret heard his last words—"Come back to my room later"—then he came directly toward her, hand outstretched, and she could not help but extend her own with some show of cordiality, and murmur some polite return to his earnest, "This is a great pleasure, Miss Le Beau."

Those in the party who had met him before, were cordial enough to atone for any possible lack in Margaret—unless it might have been that Peyton looked a little

askance at him, for he had not quite liked his singling out Margaret for his first and most eager greeting. The young collegian flushed with mingled awe and pleasure when he was presented to him, for here was a far greater man to "tell our fellows about."

It was Mrs. Paxton who said to him:

"Is your time so valuable this evening that you can't spare us a few minutes, Mr. Dalton? indicating a chair beside her as she spoke.

He glanced quickly at Margaret, hoping she would second the invitation, but Hugh was murmuring something in her ear and she either did not hear Mrs. Paxton, or pretended not to. He had to make his reply without getting what he wanted.

"Thank you, Mrs. Paxton, I think I have worked hard enough since I left you this afternoon, to have secured a little rest and pleasure, if you will let me stay a few minutes. I have an engagement a little later."

For the next ten minutes conversation was general and extremely animated, for there was such simple cordiality in John's nature as to draw out a ready return in kind, and most of those present had already come under the magnetism of his strong personality. The young collegian had yielded to it at once, and Hugh, who had held his judgment in abeyance during the oration of the afternoon, had surrendered unconditionally at Mrs. Paxton's tea, and was now his staunchest admirer. Only Peyton still kept critically aloof—for he could not yet decide in his own mind that the man was not a political demagogue playing his part cleverly—and Margaret,

sensitive to her brother's attitude and embarrassed by it, took but little part in the conversation.

John, who perforce was doing most of the talking, compelled thereto by his admiring circle, addressed no word to her, though more than once his keen, observant glance rested upon her for a brief moment. His eyes did not betray him, and it was but another evidence of the strength of the man, that he went on talking clearly and collectedly, when each glance left him a little more dazed and bewildered by the exceeding loveliness of Margaret in evening dress. He had thought her lovely in the afternoon, with a loveliness that reminded him of the pretty child of seventeen years before, but he could see no trace of the child in this radiant woman under the flood of electric lights that brought out each rich tint of hair and cheek, and every beautiful curve of brow and lip and throat, carrying herself like a queen and looking like one, in her trailing robes of pale blue, half veiled in the soft chiffon of her long evening wrap. He had been keenly sensitive to her brother's attitude towards him, but it was not the unexpressed hostility of the brother that daunted him—that made him hesitate to carry out the plan he had formulated to himself so distinctly in the afternoon, for renewing his friendly acquaintance with the little Peggy of old—it was the aloofness in which she was set by her beauty and, perhaps by an intangible air of pride of cast, that proved to be a defense with which he had no weapons to cope.

Twice when his glance had dwelt upon her for that brief moment, her eyes had been down resting upon the

fan in her lap with which she was idly toying. The third time he had just replied to a remark from Hugh. Hugh was beginning to feel that he was of Dalton's party, regardless of platform or principles, and so he was asking rather anxiously much the same question that had come up in the afternoon.

"Do you think there's any chance of your party winning unless you radically change your platform?"

And John had given in substance the same answer he had given before, but quietly and without the effect of bristling which had been noticeable in his reply to Peyton:

"I think we stand a very good chance this year, but we would lose cheerfully for the next fifty years rather than give up the least of the principles for which we are making our fight." And Margaret could no more have helped the swift lifting of her eyes to his, and no more have kept out of them the glowing admiration and sympathy, than John could help turning his eyes to her for that sympathy he was so sure he would find.

That look won the day for him and renewed with added vigor his determination of the afternoon. He had but a few minutes more to stay. Bell-boys had been bringing him notes at intervals, to which, with a word of apology, he had scribbled hasty answers, but now one was presented that seemed of a more imperative nature.

"Tell Mr. Seton I will be with him immediately," he said, and then began his adieux in leisurely fashion, making gallant little speeches to each lady in turn.

"Miss Le Beau," he said, as he came to her last, "Were you ever a mascot?"

"Not that I know of," began Margaret, wondering at the oddity of his question, and then with a swift return of a dim memory and a musing smile—"Oh, yes, once—when I was a child."

"Have you any objections to being one?"

"Not in the least, provided I am not to be exhibited publicly in bizarre costume, like the mascots at football; but why?"

"Oh, you know we politicians are dreadfully superstitious—it's our one weakness"—with gay irony. "And the rule for mascots is: Take the most beautiful thing you see twice in succession on the eve of conflict. So will you consent to serve and help me to win in the convention?"

She could not be offended with the baldness of his compliment, because of his laughing manner of making it, as of one saying a true thing in idle jest; so she answered him in his own jesting spirit:

"You make it impossible for me to refuse." And then, with a sudden significant change in tone and glance, she added—"But win what?"

He colored quickly, and turned grave at once, speaking in a lower tone so that the others, who were now all rising and making hurried preparations for departure, the lateness of the hour having suddenly impressed itself upon them, did not hear:

"Oh, I did not suppose you could misunderstand. It is no personal fight I wish you to champion, but a fight for

those principles by which I believe our party should stand or fall—a fight in which I was sure I could rely upon your sympathy and encouragement."

And Margaret, kindling again with an ardor like to the ardor of the farmer lad in Festival Hall, answered:

"You can rely upon both."

CHAPTER V.

ON THE EVE OF THE CONFLICT.

Mr. Seton met Mr. Dalton half way down the corridor, and walked with him to the door of his room.

"Well," he said with a deprecatory laugh, "did I do right? You told me to send for you if you didn't come in ten minutes, and I waited fifteen. I hope I didn't send too soon after all—you seemed to be having a very good time."

"Not a bit too soon! I'm afraid as it is I stayed longer than was good for me. But come in, come in, Frank," he urged, holding his door open, "you said you had something of importance to say to me."

The other hesitated a moment.

"I ought to let you get some sleep—it's twelve o'clock, and perhaps the only night this week you'll be able to get to bed, with the convention and committees and sub-committees."

"Oh, it won't be so bad as that I hope. But never mind, come in anyway. I'm not sleepy and I want to talk it over with you again before the fight begins."

The room was flooded with moon-light, there was no need of lights for talking and the two men moved their chairs by the window, where a fitful breeze gave some relief from the heat, lighted their cigars and then, each waited for the other to begin.

John, however, was hardly waiting. He was enjoying the first moments of quiet he had known for the day and indulging a little in what was to him almost an untried luxury—the luxury of idle dreams, where hair of tawny gold, and starry eyes, and the low musical tones of a woman's voice all mingled in a delicious whirl. So deep was he in his reverie that he woke with a start at the sound of his friend's voice, and glanced swiftly and guiltily at him to assure himself that his weakness had not been discovered. But dreaming of a woman was the last thing anyone would have suspected John Dalton of, and Frank Seton, who knew him better than anyone knew him, would have been the last man to do the suspecting.

He was himself trying to get his courage up to say what he had come to say, and was temporizing by an idle question.

"How do you happen to have a room to yourself, when even the big bosses have six room-mates?"

"Oh, they're good to me here," answered John smilingly, "and I *had* to have it, you know, with all the work I have to do. But I don't believe they are charging me any more than they are charging the other fellows."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they were *giving* it to you, they adore you so," said Seton, with a glance that was itself not wholly free from a suspicion of fondness. Then he went on hesitatingly, "But, John, you don't ask me what I had of importance to say; don't you care to hear it?"

"Very much, Frank. I've been waiting for you to

begin, and incidentally enjoying this quiet smoke so much after the day's rush, that I was in no hurry about it."

The other seemed to hesitate still more.

"You believe, John, don't you, that I am heart and soul with you in your fight against the trusts?"

He seemed to wait for an answer, and John reached over and grasped his hand.

"I would as soon think of doubting myself as of doubting you, old fellow," and the ring of his voice and the half tender smile on his face, proved what men said of him—that the softest spot in John Dalton's heart was for his life-long friend, Frank Seton.

"You make it still harder for me to say it, John, but here goes. When you were at that tea this afternoon, and in this last quarter of an hour while you were talking with those people, I have been industriously mixing with the delegates from every state, and have been proving what everybody has been telling me, but I would not believe: *Jim Burton has this convention under his thumb.* What he says goes. I have it from his own lips that he will give you the nomination if you will give up that trust plank. You are—"

But Seton did not finish his sentence. He could see in the bright moonlight that fell full on John's face that he had been growing steadily paler and his grey eyes darker and brighter till they looked like black glowing coals. Now he interrupted his friend harshly:

"Do you mean to say you are an emissary from Jim

Burton to *me?* Do you come with a bribe in your hand to tempt me to forsake my duty?"

Seton colored as much as Dalton had paled.

"Don't put it that way, John. No, I am not an emissary from Jim Burton! I resented his suggestion as indignantly as you would have done, when he made it, and my indignation brought him down a little, I suppose. He said, 'Dalton's the choice of the other half of the party in my state. Personally I very much prefer Berkeley—he's a saner man. But if Dalton could be induced to give up the trusts, or even to tone down his plank, we'd unite on him; and you know where my state leads half the states of the Union will follow.' "

"How did you answer him?" the words came with a harsh clip.

"I answered him as I believed you would have me answer him. I said it was impossible to suggest such a thing to Mr. Dalton. The question of trusts with you was a question of principle, not of expediency. Neither did we grant his state such an overwhelming influence in the party. Mr. Dalton was himself a power to be accounted with. And as to Berkeley's sanity, we had no means of deciding—he might be a fit subject for Bloomingdale for all that the country could judge of it from any utterances of his own."

In spite of himself, a grim smile curled Dalton's lips, but his only reply was the curt monosyllable—"Well?"

"Well, that was about all." For the first time John's tone softened:

"Then you are not bringing me any bribes or even any

suggestions. You are merely reporting to me your conversation with Jim Burton."

"It's a little more than that, John. Listen to me patiently, please," as he saw John's eyes begin to flash again. "I resented it at the time, but I've been thinking it over since, and talking with the delegates from the East and the South, and this is the way it looks to me. Now—remember you are to listen quietly till I finish! If by modifying your trust plank—making it a little less radical—you could secure the nomination for the presidency, and, as I believe is more than probable this year, the election, would you not be accomplishing your purpose more surely than in any other way? There is scarcely any limit to the power of our Chief Executive. You can then fight the trusts from a position of advantage; you can crush them! But persist in presenting your plank as it now is, you lose the nomination and Berkeley gets it. Then even if you succeed in getting your plank into the platform (Burton says you never will) Berkeley as President will ignore it. He's an eastern man and he's not going to fight his friends. The question is, whether you are not betraying your friends and your principles more by not compromising, than by compromising."

"Frank, Frank," said Dalton, shaking his head sadly, "shall I have to say to you—'Get thee behind me, Satan!' You are presenting to me the very arguments the devil has been tormenting me with all this afternoon and evening, and in his very words. Did you see those farmer boys pour into Festival Hall this afternoon?

They were *my* lads from the West and the South. They are relying on me to fight their battle with the trusts for them; their battle with the great food trusts that grind down the price of cattle and corn paid to the farmer until, labor as he may, he can earn a bare livelihood, and put up the price of bread and beef to his fellow worker in the cities until, toil as he may, he cannot keep the wolf from the door. They are trusting me to fight their battles with the railroads, with their iniquitous rebates to the great monopolies and their prohibitive high rates to the farmers! Oh, you know them all, the whole long list of iniquities; and you know how they grind the faces of my boys in the West and the South. And those boys are trusting me! How can I betray them!"

He sprang to his feet and began to walk up and down the room excitedly. His cigar had gone out; he stopped and lighted another, but only puffed at it fitfully as, with bent head and arms crossed behind him, he strode back and forth.

His friend did not speak; but sat and watched him silently and anxiously. For full five minutes the silence was unbroken, then John brought himself to an abrupt stop before Seton's chair.

"Frank," he said, with a queer little hesitancy in his tones, quite foreign to him, "You are always laughing at me for being superstitious, but perhaps even you will think there is something strange in this. If at each great crisis in your life there had appeared to you a beautiful creature (whom you never saw except at those crises), and if success had always followed, would you

not feel as if she were a symbol to you, and would not her reappearance begin to seem to you almost an assurance of success?"

"Perhaps so," said Seton wonderingly, for John seemed to be waiting for an answer to his question. "But I wish you would be a little more explicit; is this a vision that returns, or a flesh and blood reality?"

John ignored the question.

"The day I began my college career—"

"And what a career it was!" interrupted his college chum enthusiastically, who could never hear college referred to without becoming a boy again.

John smiled sympathetically and started again. "The day I began my college career, I met a beautiful child who interested me greatly and of whom I often thought, but did not see again until four years later. On the day that I was entering this very city to make my start in life, I met her again, older, of course, but still a child. She seemed to me then a harbinger of good luck, and I asked her, half in jest, half in earnest, if she would be my 'mascot.' I think I can say modestly, my life has not been a failure."

"A marvelous success!" interjected Seton, but this time John did not notice the interruption even by a smile.

"To-day, at the third great crisis of my life, I met her again, no longer a child, but a beautiful woman—I think the most beautiful I have ever seen. Coming on the eve of a great conflict, and coming for the third time (which meant 'charm' you know, in our childish days), would

you not think she comes as an assurance of success?"

Without waiting for Seton to agree with him, he hurried on:

"But—almost as soon as she appears, this tormenting question of a compromise is suggested, first by my own thoughts, and then by my trusted friend voicing my very thoughts—till I almost think at times I hear her say—'If you compromise, I will bring you success.'"

He resumed his rapid stride, head once more bent, and for another five minutes the silence was unbroken. He stopped again as abruptly as before, but this time to throw up his head with a laugh.

"Frank, no doubt you already think me a silly, superstitious old woman, but listen! There's more and worse. That child, the second time I saw her, gave me a little golden curl, and I told her I would keep it, and when I became President of the United States and she was a beautiful young lady, I would call on her and show her the curl and say to her, 'Behold the talisman that has brought me wealth and fame!' I have always carried the curl in my watch—for luck—though for years the thought of the child has passed almost as completely from my mind as I know I have passed from hers. But to-day it has all come vividly back, and with it a foolish feeling that it would add greatly to my triumph, if I should win the nomination and afterwards the election, to be able to go to her and make that silly little speech."

John glanced sheepishly at his friend, awaiting the ridicule he knew he deserved. But to his surprise Seton seemed greatly agitated. He sprang to his feet and took

hold of John's arm roughly, almost with the effect of giving him a shake.

"John, John!" he exclaimed anxiously, "You don't mean you're falling in love at your age! and just now at this crisis, of all times!"

The dismay in his face was too real and too great to be made light of, but also it was too irresistibly funny. John threw back his head and laughed, peal upon peal, until he saw Seton was growing angry. Then with a mighty effort, he sobered at once. He laid his arm affectionately over his friend's shoulder—he was the taller of the two.

"Well, well," he said, "what confirmed old bachelors we two must be! I never realized it before, but the fact that you consider falling in love the direst catastrophe that could befall me, gives me a 'realizing sense.' No, old comrade, I'm not 'falling in love.' I'll never desert Micawber! We two will go down the hill together, as we have climbed it together."

There was some real feeling in the tones in which he uttered his last words, and Seton acknowledged it by a silent pressure of the hand he was holding. Then he spoke abruptly—

"I must go, and give you a chance at some sleep. But you *will* think of what I said, John?"

Dalton's face, which had been half tender as he looked at Seton, clouded again, and he thought a moment before he spoke.

"Yes, I'll think of it," he said slowly, "and give you my answer to-morrow. Good night, old friend."

Left to himself, he tried conscientiously for five minutes to think of it, but he found that he was thinking instead—what would she say? He gave it up, flung away his cigar, and sat for the next five minutes, his head resting on the back of his chair, a smile on his lips, gazing dreamily out at the moon riding high in the sky through flotillas of fleecy white clouds. He sprang to his feet as he finished his revery, flung back his head—a trick left over from boyhood—and spoke aloud.

"I *would* like to be able to make that speech to her—she's a glorious woman!" A moment later, a little cloud came over his face as Seton's expression, 'at your age,' recurred to him. He turned on the electric light and looked at himself in the glass. "Am I so old?" he thought half wistfully, "I'm not yet forty-three and she must be nearly thirty." And then realizing what he was doing, he gave himself a vigorous shake, while his eyes twinkled with laughter at his own expense:

"Yes, you old woman," he said to the figure in the glass, "you *are* old; old enough to be her grandmother!"

CHAPTER VI.

A MAN'S DELIBERATIONS: A WOMAN'S INTUITIONS.

Dalton rose early the next morning; it would be a full day with him and he must get ready for it. His way of getting ready was to ring for a cup of coffee and order a horse; a cold plunge, a cup of coffee, and an early morning gallop would make him fit for anything.

He rode west until he struck the Boulevard, and then on, past the beautiful residences of the western part of the city. He wondered which one of them was Miss Le Beau's home, but it was an idle wonder, he had no idea even in what part of the city she lived.

At the entrance to the park he drew rein a minute and looked over the beautiful picture spread out before him. The low morning sun was at his back, bringing it all out with the clearness of an etching. Directly in front of him the broad drive dipped and curved away under the wide arch of a great railroad bridge, leaving him a commanding view of the deep vales and wooded ridges of the park rising beyond, one above the other, until, a mile or two to the west, they were bounded by the wonderful battlements and towers and sculptured minarets and gilded domes of the great Fair, sparkling and glowing in the level rays of the morning sun against their background of deep blue sky, like fairy palaces of a dream vision.

A little mist hung over the tops of the wooded ridges,

rising from the little river that in its winding course through the park doubled on itself a dozen times. A great western flyer was rushing across the railway bridge towards the city, with the noise of thunder, its long line of sleepers suggesting to Dalton the hot and dusty discomfort of the crowded passengers, and giving him a keener sense of the dewy freshness of the early morning.

He followed the curving road as it led him under the railway bridge, and then over a picturesque bridge of stone, crossing the winding little river, until he struck a narrow bridle path leading away from the main drives. At that early hour he was as much alone in the park as if he were in the depths of a virgin forest; squirrels were scampering along the boughs, thrushes were calling to one another from distant coverts, brilliant orioles were flashing from tree to tree, and a cardinal bird, like a tongue of musical flame, was fluting his exquisite song to his mate. It was an hour for clear thought and high resolve. All the doubts that had harrassed and distressed him the night before, fled away in this quiet hour, as the rising mists from the little River des Peres were fleeing before the morning sun. Now there was no question of expediency, there was but the one question of right.

His path wound up over one of the wooded ridges. He wheeled his horse on the crest and faced the sun and the city, lying under its low perpetual dun-colored cloud. He knew that back there, if any rays of the sun filtered through that cloud of smoke, they were colorless and feeble; up here he stood in the glorious flood of sunshine, the fresh, pure morning air entering his lungs like wine

and sending the blood racing through his veins with the vigor of twenty-one. It was perfectly plain to him now —no sophistries could dim the clear mental vision of the morning—there was a great principle at stake, and win the prize or lose it, he would be true to his colors. He lifted his hat with some unconscious feeling of being in a great Presence, and said to himself reverently, "I will stand or fall by God's eternal truth."

He was an hour's ride from his hotel, and the sun would have told him, even if he had not glanced at his watch, that the day was advancing. He put his horse to a swift gallop through the deserted park roads, and then to a brisk and more circumspect trot along the boulevards and streets, reaching his hotel in time for a substantial eight o'clock breakfast, which he enjoyed with the keen appetite of a man who has had the best of tonics —a morning ride. And also with the zest of one who, after a time of struggle, is once more at peace with his conscience; and with the added zest of a born fighter, who knows the arena is ready and who feels himself in perfect fighting trim.

He picked up the morning paper and read there the account of the Standard Oil Company's first move in its battle with the Kansas Legislature over state refineries, and the vindictiveness and cruelty of the measures resorted to by the great trust, stirred his blood to boiling and confirmed him in the righteousness of his decision.

In his mail was a little note from Mrs. Paxton, asking him if it would be possible to come out to dinner that evening, quite informally, only the Le Beaus and them-

selves; and adding, they would be glad to have him bring his friend, Mr. Seton, if he would, of whom they had heard much.

His first impulse was that it was impossible—there would be meetings of committees that he could not shirk if he would. His second impulse was that he would like greatly to accept this invitation, if it were possible, for he might find a chance to lay before Miss Le Beau the moral dilemma that had confronted him but which he had solved. Not that her opinion would in any way affect his decision—that was made for all time—but he curiously desired to know what her attitude would be in such a crucial test. His third impulse was that, perhaps, after all it was not impossible—it might be arranged.

He freed himself from the throng that waylaid him as he left the dining-room, long enough to call up Mrs. Paxton by telephone, for so she had asked him to reply. He said he had a committee meeting at nine, but if he could present himself at the early hour of seven he would have an hour or an hour and a half at his disposal. Mrs. Paxton assured him they would be grateful for so much, and since the hour was early and the time short they would have summer high tea instead of a formal dinner.

He accepted for his friend Seton without consulting him, and when he informed him of that fact he found he had very nearly over-stepped his privileges. There was not much Seton would not do for Dalton, but to go to a strange house to meet "a lot of women," seemed to be where he drew the line. It required all Dalton's eloquence and a final appeal to friendship to win at last a

reluctant consent to keep the engagement his friend had made for him.

John was more pleased at Frank's final surrender than the occasion would seem to warrant. He hardly knew himself why he should be so pleased, but without doubt he was anxious that his friend should meet Miss Le Beau and come under the influence of her winning personality, for to himself he had already begun to count her in his list of friends, and deplored the antagonism toward her that he thought he had detected in Frank, his oldest and best of friends.

Promptly at seven, the two men presented themselves at Mrs. Paxton's handsome house in beautiful Devonshire Place, and found the company already assembled and at ease on the shady lawn and cool stone terrace. It was as Mrs. Paxton had promised, quite a family affair, except that Julie Delauney and a visiting friend of hers had been added, presumably to balance the table with Hugh and Mr. Seton.

Seton, from the moment he had caught a glimpse of the light dresses through the trees, as they approached the house, had not ceased to grumble and mutter under his breath, and Dalton was whimsically afraid that he might be tempted to make a display to his hostess and the other ladies of his distaste for feminine society. But nothing could exceed the suavity of Frank's manners when once fairly undergoing the ordeal of the presentations, a suavity whose excess might lead one to suspect it donned as a cloak for embarrassment. Julie, who knew him well by reputation as immensely rich and a

great catch, but as difficult to land as a Saguenay salmon, made at once what her friends would have called a "dead set" for him; not probably with any definite purpose, but because it was her nature to miss no opportunities; and Frank, who was too sure of himself to feel any necessity of being on guard, did not object to her angling, as it relieved him from all responsibility in the matter of entertainment. Also, Julie had a bright and dainty way of dressing up her bait that rather tickled the palate of the old recluse; and much to his own surprise he found himself enjoying this dinner that he had looked forward to with equal dread and scorn.

Mrs. Paxton was nervously afraid of delaying her guest of honor beyond his alloted time, and so summoned them all at once to the table, having secured the promptness of the others by inviting them for a quarter before the hour. The table was set on that part of the stone terrace that continued around the side of the house, and which trees and shrubbery screened sufficiently from any passers-by. She had redeemed her promise also of making it a high tea instead of a formal dinner, and dainty little dishes took the place of heavy courses, with a delicious salad tossed up deftly and quickly at the table by the hostess, who justly prided herself on her salad dressing. All voted it a delightful innovation and were in favor of making high teas a permanent substitute for dinners in summer, and everyone likewise was in high good humor with himself and his hostess and the talk was as easy and informal as the dinner.

Julie was a little more obviously and appealingly

young than usual in her way of lifting her soft dark eyes half timidly to Mr. Seton, and this man, with his hair already showing grey at the temples, but as innocent of woman's wiles as a babe, thought her a sweet child and patronized her accordingly—much to Julie's delight and to the amusement of the others. Unless they were ill-natured enough to say, as Hugh said to Margaret, whom he had been permitted to take out to dinner:

"Oh say, it's a sin to let Julie Delauney make a fool of a sensible old fellow like that."

The visiting young lady was also enjoying herself, because she thought she was making herself very agreeable to the man Julie had informed her was the most desirable *parti* of the city and "no end of a swell." If Peyton was not having quite as good a time himself, he did not betray it, either to the visiting young lady or to his hostess, who sometimes allowed her glance to stray in his direction.

Hugh was enjoying himself immensely. Just to be sitting beside Margaret at the table was pleasure enough for one evening, and he was humbly grateful to his sister for securing that pleasure for him, when no doubt Mr. Seton should have been assigned to that honor. To be sure he was not having Margaret's undivided attention—she was continually joining in the discussions across the table, of convention men and measures, in which Peyton and Dalton were almost invariably pitted against each other.

Not that Hugh minded, he had always known Margaret was "keen for politics" and admired it greatly in her; his admiration, in fact, for the part she was able to take in a

political discussion was quite in proportion to his modest view of his own abilities in that direction. Moreover, he was beginning to have a very great admiration for Dalton; so great, indeed, that his enjoyment in listening to him and in watching the swift play of expression on his strong face as he uttered his flashing sentences, was second only to the enjoyment he would have found in a confidential tete-a-tete with Margaret.

Margaret was happy, because it was her nature to find her keenest joy in the joy of the intellect, and it was not often in the dull routine of social life that she met with so stimulating a mind as Dalton's. Dalton was happy, because he sat opposite Margaret and could catch the swift and sympathetic response of her glowing eyes and wonderful smile, and they were like champagne to him, or rather some nobler kind of inspiration, so that he grew more and more brilliant until he gradually drew to himself the wrapt attention of the whole table. Julie left her angling and Seton his nibbling to look and listen; the visiting young lady ceased her tentative attempts at a flirtation with the most eligible man in the city; and even Peyton's cynicism was for a time in thrall to his admiration.

Of course, in such a state of affairs, the hostess could not help but be happy in the happiness of her guests, and so it was an unusually successful party that sat out on the stone terrace in the soft air of the summer evening, the silver and crystal and fine china and linen, sparkling first in the rays of the setting sun, then catching the rose and violet glow of the twilight, then gleaming coldly in the white moonlight that was flooding dinner table and

dinner guests before the party broke up.

Dalton's thanks were due to Julie for securing for him the opportunity that he so much desired of putting his case before Margaret. He and Seton were rising to withdraw; it was time, if he was to keep that nine o'clock engagement.

"Why can't we all walk down with them to the car?" lisped Julie, "It's such a lovely moonlight night for a walk."

There were no dissenting voices to such a proposal on such a night, and so the little party of eight walked two and two down through beautiful Devonshire Place, the moonlight weaving a lacy network about them as they walked under spreading lindens and maples, and every man by some cunning manipulation of the fates walking beside the woman he most desired to be beside.

All but poor Hugh, who found that Peyton had adroitly relegated the visiting young lady to him and was himself walking beside Hugh's sister. It was Dalton's quickness in seizing his opportunity and appropriating Margaret to himself that no doubt gave Peyton his chance.

John had lost no time in beginning. He plunged at once into what he called a hypothetical case, first telling Margaret he very much desired to hear her view of the matter. He put both sides as strongly as they had presented themselves to him, and especially dwelt upon the probability of the purpose being accomplished by a compromise and lost without it.

In his eagerness in stating the case and Margaret's

eagerness in listening, of which he was distinctly aware, they had unconsciously quickened their pace and found themselves some distance in advance of the others, and so stopped in the shadow of the great gates at the entrance of the Place to wait for them.

It was at this moment that John had finished his statement of his case, and as they waited, he said:

"Now will you give me, Miss Le Beau, your opinion of what this man's course should be? Should he compromise and so almost certainly win the power to accomplish his purpose? Or should he stand by his principles and almost as certainly fail?"

"Do you want me to give you my first impression, without stopping to think it over carefully?"

"I believe," John answered slowly,—"and I hope you will not think me uncomplimentary in saying it—that I would rather trust a woman's intuitions than her deliberate thoughts."

"Yes, I think you *are* uncomplimentary," said Margaret, who rather prided herself on her ability to think clearly, "but none the less, I will give you my 'intuitions.' It seems to me there is never any question where right and wrong are concerned. Right is right, and wrong is wrong. If a man believes he is right in fighting the trusts—that here is a great wrong to be righted and he is the one to do it, then no considerations of place or power or expediency should have a feather's weight with him. Let the heavens fall, he must still move steadfastly ahead on the line of duty."

"Thank you, Miss Le Beau, I was not mistaken. A

woman's intuitions are always right, no matter what her thoughts may be."

John spoke with an attempt at lightness, but there was so much of earnest in his feeling that it betrayed itself to Margaret's quick intelligence. The others were coming up and his car was nearing the head of the street a little distance away, where he must take it. Margaret answered both the lightness and the earnest:

"I am going home to think it over, Mr. Dalton, and the next time I see you, I will tell you whether my thoughts gave me any different conclusions from my intuitions."

Dalton answered with a smile that Margaret could not so much see as feel, since the archway where they stood was in the shadow. Then he extended his hand and added:

"The battle is on, Miss Le Beau, will you wish me success?"

"With all my heart," answered Margaret, as she felt the strong grasp of his hand on her slender one. There was no time for any more. Mr. Seton came up with the others, and hurried John off to catch the car, since he was in danger of being late for his committee meeting, and good-byes were said in haste.

Dalton and Seton had the car to themselves in starting, since this was the end of the line and it seemed to be an hour either too early or too late for anyone to be going east. John seized the chance before other passengers should enter the car.

"Frank," he said, "you've not asked me my decision."

"I've been waiting for you to tell me," answered Frank, regarding his friend anxiously, as if afraid to hear what he was yet most desirous of hearing.

"Did you read the papers this morning?"

"About the Standard Oil Company in Kansas, I suppose you mean?"

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Well, it's all of a piece with the tyranny and vindictiveness the Standard Oil has always shown, and for that matter all the trusts; but I don't see that it has anything to do with your decision."

"No, it hasn't. My decision was made before I saw the papers. I am going to stick to my plank, Frank. On that plank I'll sink or swim!"

Frank did not reply, and John, regarding him as anxiously as he had been regarded a moment before, saw that Frank's honest face betrayed the keenness of his disappointment. He put his arm affectionately over his friend's shoulders. It was not an infrequent caress with him; in his friendship for Seton there was always something of the tenderness of the stronger for the weaker:

"Don't take it so to heart, old fellow," he said. "After all there's as much chance that I will swim as sink. Jim Burton is no stronger man than I, and I never was in better fighting trim. But whatever the result, wouldn't you rather I should 'be right than be President'?"

"I suppose so," said Frank, but so dolefully that John

released his shoulder with a resounding clap and threw back his head and laughed.

"One would think you were in for the spoils, Sir Knight of the Rueful Countenance," he said when he had sobered himself, "and you know, if I'm President, you don't come in for so much as a bone to pick."

"You mean," said Frank reddening quickly, "if you should dare to offer me so much as a bone to pick I would throw it in your face."

"Forgive me, Frank," said John, grave enough now, "I thought you knew it was a joke. No one knows better than I that you are the most disinterested of partisans and the most loyal of friends."

There was nothing more said for a minute; then Frank spoke hesitatingly:

"Did—did—Miss Le Beau have anything to do with your decision?"

"Now I think you will have to beg *my* pardon, Frank," said John sternly, "or Miss Le Beau's through me."

Frank reddened again.

"I am an ass, John; but you'll have to forgive me, old man. I'm terribly cut up, and 'most as much worried about her as about the other matter. She's a woman would bewitch any man—I could see that."

Then John laughed again.

"And how about Miss Delauney? If my eyes did not deceive me, you were very well pleased with her attentions."

"Oh, she's a nice child," said Frank loftily. "And by the way," he added, "she says there's an article in one of

the magazines about you that's fine, and she's going to bring it to me to read to-morrow."

"So you've made an appointment to meet her to-morrow," said John teasingly. "Matters have progressed further than I supposed."

"Well—ah," said Frank, to John's amazement blushing and stammering and taking him seriously, "you see she has a ticket for the Le Beau's box, and she asked me to call on her in the box to-morrow. Of course I couldn't be so rude as to refuse," and Frank glanced at John with an inexpressibly sheepish air of apology.

"Oh Frank, Frank," said John, shaking his head sadly, "I never thought you would be falling in love at your age, and at such a crisis as this!"

Then both men laughed like the two big boys they were, and they were still laughing when the car stopped and four or five men from one of the up-town hotels, also on their way down to committee meetings, got aboard, and at sight of Seton and Dalton joined them at once with boisterous greetings; and the rest of the down-town trip was as hilarious as such an assemblage of men on the eve of a convention is apt to be.

CHAPTER VII.

'TIA ELISA.

After all, Margaret did not attend the first day of the convention, though she had said many times, nothing could induce her to lose an hour of it from opening to close.

She was called to the telephone before breakfast to talk to 'Tia Elisa over the long distance connection. There had always been a 'Tia Elisa in the family since the days of the Spanish domination, from which days the pretty Spanish appellation had descended; and the Tia Elisa had always been a household angel, a dear maiden aunt, loving and spoiling and blessing the children of the household. The present Tia Elisa had been a mother to Peyton and Margaret; Margaret, indeed, never having known any other.

It was the family custom to leave the town house in May and move out to Beauvoir, the old family house at Kentwick. This year Margaret, and Peyton too, though he liked to pretend it was all Margaret's doings, had elected to stay in town through May and June and part of July, for the Fair and the convention.

But Tia Elisa could not thus easily derange the habits of a lifetime; and on the first of May, the day that for sixty years had not failed, rain or shine, week-day or Sabbath-day, to see her at Beauvoir, saw her once more duly installed there, leaving Margaret and Peyton to

console each other in the house in Devonshire Place. Her telephone message was to say that she had not seen Margaret since Sunday, and was pining for a sight of her sweet face, as she put it in her motherly fashion; and confessed also to a headache the day before, from which she was just recovering.

Margaret might have pleaded her desire to attend the convention if it had not been for the headache; but Tia Elisa's headaches were events in the family, coming rarely, but leaving her weak and ill for a day or two. Margaret reproached herself at once with neglect, though it was a reproach she hardly deserved, since it had been agreed that she and Peyton should spend Sundays at Beauvoir with Tia Elisa, but that during the week they would run out at any time that they could steal from the engagements the Fair entailed; and Tia Elisa had herself insisted that she would not be at all lonely, even if they found themselves limited to their Sunday visits, since she had her flowers and her fowls and her country neighbors, friends of a lifetime, and her country poor, dependents of a lifetime, to keep her fully occupied.

Hearing of Tia Elisa's headache, Peyton was ready at once with his offers of service.

"I will run you out in the machine, Margaret, and when you're ready to come back I'll go for you."

"Oh, but you don't suppose, Peyton, I will have to stay later than this evening or to-morrow morning?"

Margaret's tone showed the dismay she felt at the possibility of losing more of the convention.

"Oh, if Tia Elisa should be really sick, I suppose you

wouldn't desert her," said Peyton cheerfully.

"No," said Margaret slowly, then added in a brighter tone, "But I'm not going to contemplate such a dire possibility. It's bad enough to have to lose the opening day—the fates couldn't be so hard as to keep me away longer."

"You poor child!" said Peyton, with such quick compunction, that a dim suspicion entered Margaret's mind—"Perhaps Tia Elisa isn't sick enough to really need you; let me call her up and see."

"Not for worlds!" said Margaret quickly. "Of course she would *say* she didn't need me. I'm surprised at you for thinking of such a thing, Peyton."

"All right, then," returned Peyton, with the air of one dismissing all sense of responsibility. "We'll start as soon as breakfast's over."

The dim suspicion continued to haunt Margaret at intervals all through the swift ride in the fresh morning air, and returned with strength when she found Tia Elisa waiting for them on the cool piazza, looking not half as ill as she had expected to see her, and looking instead a trifle embarrassed as she met Peyton's glance—an embarrassment which she hastened to cover by an unusual effusiveness of manner in her greeting.

Peyton stayed no longer than was necessary for dutiful inquiries as to Tia Elisa's health, and then hurried off to keep a business engagement in the city. The suspicion had now become almost a certainty to Margaret, as the color in Tia Elisa's face was far from her wonted pallor after a headache, and seemed to grow rosier at finding

herself alone with Margaret, while the nervousness did not diminish.

"Come down into the garden and see the flowers, Meg dear, before it gets any hotter. Not that there is much to see; the roses are gone, you know," and Tia Elisa rose nervously from her chair and turned to lead the way.

But Margaret was bent on mischief.

"Oh, no, Tia dear," she exclaimed solicitously, "you know after one of your headaches you must keep perfectly still," and with tender violence she forced Tia Elisa back into her chair. "Now I'll bring you a fan and a book, and I'll read to you and fan you, and you shall fold your hands and keep absolutely quiet."

"Oh, Margaret! I'm not so ill as all that! It was not one of my bad headaches, you know, only a little one, and I'm feeling quite well to-day."

Tia Elisa spoke irritably, and for some reason she avoided meeting Margaret's eyes.

Margaret answered her with assumed playfulness, determined on still further punishment for the trick she was now sure had been played upon her.

"Oh, I know my dear old Tia too well to be imposed upon in that way. You are trying to make the best of it for my sake. You are afraid I will be dull because I had to miss the opening of the convention. Just as if I wouldn't miss a thousand conventions gladly for my dearest Tia, when she has one of her bad headaches."

Tia Elisa sat suddenly erect, her eyes wide with an exaggerated dismay that came near to being horror.

"Miss the Convention! Why, Peyton never said a

word of that!" she blurted out, and then suddenly realizing that she had betrayed Peyton, her eye-lids dropped and her sweet old face grew rosy-red.

But Margaret was relentless.

"He only telephoned, I supposed—or did he write?—that he wanted you to plead a headache or any old excuse to get me out here. Perhaps he mentioned that he thought I was seeing too much of some of the members of the convention?"

Margaret spoke with elaborate sweetness, but it did not seem to relieve Tia Elisa's distress. "Yes," she murmured miserably in answer to the last question, still without lifting her eyes.

There was the clatter of hoofs on the red gravel of the drive. Margaret glanced swiftly over her shoulder. Hugh, bareheaded, his fair hair blowing in the wind, and riding his tall hunter, Selim, was just turning in from Le Beau Way.

"And I suppose," said Margaret quietly, turning again to her aunt, "he told you to be sure to let Hugh know?"

Tia Elisa was too wretched to do anything more than nod her head; and at last Margaret relented.

"There, there, you dear old auntie," patting her hand as if she were a child, "it's nasty of me to tease you this way, and I'll be good now. I love to be out at dear old Beauvoir with you, and I don't mind missing the convention a bit. It's only the opening, and there won't be much doing I fancy. I don't even mind dear old Hugh—so there! Please don't look so miserable, for I'm as happy as possible." To emphasize which statement she

"There was the clatter of hoofs on the red gravel of the drive"

put her hand under Tia Elisa's chin, compelling her to look up at her as she sat on the arm of her aunt's chair.

Tia Elisa could not resist the smiling eyes into which she looked. She smiled back at them and drew Margaret's head down for a kiss and Margaret, patting her once more affectionately—this time on the shoulder—slipped from her perch and turned in time to greet Hugh, who was now within hailing distance.

"Good morning, Tia Elisa," he called, "Good morning, Margaret; would you like to beat me in a tennis set this morning?"

"Very much; nor would I mind being beaten, which is much more likely to be the case. How did you know I was here?"

"Oh, Tia Elisa has her instructions to keep me informed," with a gay glance at the old lady, who returned it with a fond one, for Hugh was one of her "soft spots."

Out on the tennis court, the balls flying back and forth in swift volleys; the air soft and warm but with nothing of the stifling heat of the city; Tia Elisa sitting in a comfortable garden chair under the shade of the lindens, placidly knitting and watching the game; and Hugh at his best, lithe, strong and skillful, calling out Margaret's ready admiration for his athletic supremacy; she began to feel that she had not been deprived of so much in missing the opening of the convention, and began therefore to forgive her brother.

They were very evenly matched as players, which made the set a long one, and as the morning advanced, the shade, which in the beginning of their game had

nearly covered the court, retreated until they were glad to take refuge from the scorching sun beside Tia Elisa under the lindens; Margaret in a garden chair, Hugh stretched at his length on the grass at the feet of the two women, his head pillowed on his clasped hands.

"Aren't we glad to have her with us at Beauvoir once more, Tia Mia?"

Hugh was quite proud of his own special appellation for Tia Elisa, and the fact that he mixed his Spanish and Italian didn't trouble him in the least. He looked straight into her eyes, as he spoke, with a glance that included Margaret in its smiling affection. Tia Elisa beamed impartially on both, her soft blue eyes shining, as she answered:

"It won't be long now, Hugh, till we have her with us for good. She's promised to come out next Sunday to stay."

"I wish you two elderly people would stop making a spoiled darling of me," said Margaret, responding to their looks rather than to their words. "You make me feel exactly sixteen! I believe you would never let me grow up if you could help it."

To which petulant speech Hugh paid no attention at all, he was too full of Tia Elisa's news, and an idea that had suddenly presented itself to him. So full, indeed, that it brought him to his feet with a spring.

"Next Sunday! That's better than I hoped. Of course the convention will be over then. I say, Margaret, do you suppose Dalton would think it was awfully fresh of me to ask him out here for a week after the con-

vention's over? He's sure to be done up and need a rest, you know, and I admire the man immensely. I'd like nothing better than to have him in the house for a week."

"Admire Mr. Dalton! Invite him to your house! What would Peyton say! I thought he considered the man hardly respectable!"

The look of horror accompanying Tia Elisa's ejaculations was too much for Hugh and Margaret, and they only succeeded in restoring themselves to the proper degree of sobriety by the sight of the color deepening in Tia Elisa's rosy cheeks, and the look of offended dignity that sat oddly enough on her amiable countenance. Margaret hastened to reassure her:

"Oh, it's not quite so bad as that, Tia Elisa, and you must forgive our laughing, for that's just what he is, so *very* respectable."

"I'll bring him over to see you, Tia Mia," said Hugh, "and if you don't proceed directly to fall head over heels in love with him, I'll be greatly disappointed. By the way, Margaret, he's a bachelor, and just about the right age for Tia Elisa; perhaps it wouldn't be quite safe to bring him here after all."

Hugh spoke by way of gentle raillery. He liked to see the sweet old lady blush, as she never failed to do at such speeches, no matter how unworthy of notice she deemed them. But he was not at all prepared for Margaret's coloring also. He did not understand it, and the puzzle of it returned many times to set him pondering.

Margaret did not understand it either, and was so much annoyed by it as to color again with annoyance.

There certainly was no reason why Hugh's suggestion that Mr. Dalton and Tia Elisa were of congenial age should displease, or annoy her, or affect her in any way. Had she not herself, upon her first sight of him, regarded him as of advanced middle age, almost an old man? What had changed him in her estimation? Hugh's light speech had come to her almost as a shock, and she realized that Mr. Dalton had begun to seem to her a very much younger man than he had seemed at first: a man not too old to be congenial, in many matters of feeling and thinking, to a young woman of her own age. With the thought came a fleeting vision of a leonine head crowned with close dark curls and set on strong square shoulders; a broad brow, and grey eyes glowing with the fires of eternal youth. "What are youth or age to such a spirit!" she thought to herself, and found herself kindling with pride at the thought.

But under the lindens the air was soft and balmy as a May day, and the three friends fell into quiet talk. Over the tennis court the heat of the noon-day sun made itself visible in a shimmering haze; the air was filled with the drowsy hum of insect life—the strident burr of locusts, the monotonous drumming of woodpeckers on distant tree trunks, the cheerful buzz of honey-bees poised on steady wing above luscious clover tops, an occasional sleepy twitter of robin or oriole roused for a moment from a mid-day siesta—sounds that make a midsummer day palpitate with the fullness of life, and mere existence a conscious joy.

Margaret, her head resting on the tall back of her chair,

her hands idly clasped in her lap, her eyes looking dreamily off through vistas formed by archways of foliage to the distant ridge where the white houses of the little village of Florrisant clustered around the spire of its old French church, was filled with a languorous sense of happiness. To be living at Beauvoir in the heart of one of the loveliest valleys in the world, away from the turmoil and unrest of the city, was to know such peace and happiness as the world seldom gives: and to have always about her people so dear to her as Tia Elisa and Hugh and Peyton, though for the moment Peyton stood rather low in her good graces—enveloping her with an incense-laden atmosphere of adoration, seemed to her the very crown of a joyous life.

Yes, she had consciously included Hugh in the people dear to her—and why not? She had known him always, and began now almost to believe that she had loved him always. Certain it was that she could hardly think of life without that devoted affection that had become as natural to her, and almost as necessary as the air she breathed. Why not, then, decide the matter at once? Make one man supremely happy, and Tia Elisa and Peyton almost as happy, and thoroughly comfortable and at rest about her?

At the thought of how Peyton would congratulate himself on the success of his little scheme, she smiled; and smiled still more as she depicted to herself Hugh's astonishment—which she was sure would for the moment eclipse his joy—should she at last give no discouraging answer to that question that for ten years she had grown

to look for as regularly as the recurring seasons.

"A penny for the meaning of your smile, Margaret," said Hugh, losing no change of that dreamy face, while chatting steadily with Tia Elisa.

"Did I smile?" said Margaret, "It must have been at the prospect of luncheon, for here comes Clotilde."

A neat mulatto girl in cap and apron came up as Margaret spoke, daughter of old Clotilde of slavery days, and she in turn descendant of many generations of Clotildes, reaching back to the old Spanish and French rule.

"Will you have luncheon out here, Miss Elisa?" asked Clotilde.

"Oh, do, Tia Elisa. I adore luncheon under the trees! And Hugh, you may stay if you like, mayn't he Tia?"

Such amiability on Margaret's part had been unusual of late, and Hugh acknowledged it with what he was pleased to call "profound and humble gratitude," while Tia Elisa beamed with pleasure, hardly thinking it necessary to add her own cordial invitation.

"It's like old times, Margaret," said Tia Elisa, when Clotilde and Gaston, a fifteen year old negro boy, had brought out a little table completely set, and they were comfortably seated around it. "Last summer you were abroad, and the summer before Hugh was away, so it has been a long time since we have been together this way in old Beauvoir."

"A long time!" Margaret half sighed as she spoke. "And how lovely it is! I feel like a little girl again today. Do you remember what happy times we used to have, Hugh? You were always like a big brother to me,

and I used to sometimes think I liked you better than Peyton, for you never teased me or 'ordered' me."

Hugh's sigh was no half one, but straight from his boots:

"Let's go back to them this summer, Margaret, I'll be the most docile of big brothers if you insist. I never thought of teasing you, but if I had wanted to, I would never have dared; you were something of a little termagant in those days, and I was dreadfully afraid of you."

Margaret smiled:

"I'm afraid I did bully you a bit, but it was a great temptation—you were always so meek."

"Ahem! just try me again this summer. I've got my cue now, and you'll find me as haughty as even you could wish. Tia Mia, what do you think of a girl who deliberately attempts to cow a man because she knows she can."

The telephone bell was ringing and Margaret was summoned to answer it. She returned in a few minutes.

"It's Peyton. He says he is going to bring Mrs. Paxton out in the auto to dinner this evening and wants me to ask Hugh over, and we'll all go in town together by moonlight. Your sister invites you to spend the night at her house. I accepted for you—was that right?"

"I ought not to have stayed to luncheon!" said Hugh with whimsical dismay. "Will you let me come to luncheon and dinner on the same day?"

"If I remember aright you used to spend the day with Peyton very often. If we are going back to the old times this summer, we may as well begin at once."

"Thank you. I'll come to dinner then, but I'm not going to wear out my welcome by spending the afternoon as well. I'll leave just as soon as you give me a dish of those delicious berries. And, by the way, where did they come from? Ours have been gone for weeks."

Clotilde, who with Gaston had been bearing from the kitchen such dainty trifles as women love for luncheon, either smoking hot or ice cold, as the nature of the dish demanded, had now as a last course set upon the little table a big bowl of fragrant raspberries, and beside it a generous pitcher of glass brimming with yellow cream. Tia Elisa answered Hugh's question with a little glow of pride:

"They are fine, aren't they? Cæsar is very proud of the Beauvoir berries. But these are the last. I believe he used some secret process to keep them for Margaret—she's so fond of them."

At this moment Cæsar himself came into the line of vision beyond the house, driving a great farm wagon loaded with crates of garden vegetables, and Margaret called to him some compliment on his fine berries that pleased the old fellow immensely.

"Is he taking that truck to the station?" asked Hugh.

"Yes," said Tia Elisa, "to go in on the two o'clock train."

Hugh called to Cæsar to wait a minute, and then said to Margaret, "What do you say, Margaret, to our riding down with him and taking the two o'clock for the Fair? We can see the pictures and hear Guillmant and come out with Peyton and Helen in the machine."

"Thank you," answered Margaret coolly, "I am spending the day with Tia Elisa at Beauvoir. Nothing could induce me to exchange these cool shades for the hot Fair, to say nothing of not being so confident as you seem to be of the pleasure our uninvited presence would give Helen and Peyton."

Hugh looked at her curiously, a long slow look into which there seemed to dawn some new intelligence:

"Well," he said at length, "I'm sorry you won't go with me, but I think I'll go anyway. I'll come back by train, however. May I run into the house first and telephone for them to send some one after Selim?"

"Suppose you leave Selim here," suggested Margaret, "and then if you get back by the early train we'll have a little ride before dinner. I want to crowd as much as possible into my one day at Beauvoir, and it has been a long time since I've had a ride on old Nell."

Nothing could have pleased Hugh more, and Tia Elisa and Margaret walking with him across the lawn to the avenue of lindens where Cæsar was waiting, he waved his good-bye to them from his high wagon seat, where he had nimbly climbed to a perch beside the old man.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FARMER'S ENTHUSIASM.

In the long afternoon spent in the cool living room open on three sides to the breezes, if any were stirring, but shaded by the piazza roof and the green trees beyond from the glare of the sun, Tia Elisa did her best to still further carry out Peyton's instructions. These had been conveyed in a closely written letter, for not to a country telephone, on a party line with three others, would Peyton entrust any such intimate advice concerning his sister.

As Margaret divined, he had confided to Tia Elisa that he was greatly worried by the fact that Margaret was seeing so much of Dalton; fearing that the romantic idea of him that she had been cherishing for four years, might ripen into a deeper interest.

He particularly feared this, he said, since the fellow seemed to be greatly taken with Margaret. Couldn't Tia Elisa get her out there on some pretext and keep her away from the convention as long as possible? He advised that she invite Hugh over, and, also, if she found an opportunity, talk to Margaret quite seriously about Hugh—what a fine fellow he was, and how devoted to her.

This letter had been written on his return from Mrs. Paxton's high tea the night before. He had himself posted it in time for the midnight collection, and Tia Elisa had received it at Beauvoir before breakfast that morning.

Peyton had not failed to observe with what adroitness Dalton had managed to secure Margaret for the walk down Devonshire Place to the car (an adroitness by which he himself had profited, but of which he none the less disapproved), nor, though apparently and really very much occupied with Mrs. Paxton, had he failed to note also, that the conversation between his sister and Dalton was not the light talk in which the others of the party were engaged, but of unusual seriousness. This was obvious from their manner, from an occasional intense gesture on Dalton's part, and from the earnestness of the tones that reached his ears at intervals. It was time, he considered, to interfere. Hence his letter to Tia Elisa.

That he should so soon seem to be undoing his own plans by telephoning Margaret that he would take her back to the city that evening in the motor car, was due partly to the fact that he had reconsidered, and concluded the perils were not so grave as he feared; but principally, to an acute attack of remorse that he should be so arbitrarily depriving his sister of any part of the convention to which she had been so long looking forward.

It was easier for him to relent, since, on further thought he concluded that, until the convention was over, Dalton would be so engaged there would be no possible opportunity for Margaret's meeting him socially, and by that time Dalton would be either so elated by his victory in winning the nomination, or crushed by his defeat, as to

have no thoughts for Margaret.

Peyton, whose heart was really very tender towards his sister—although she often resented a tenderness that showed itself sometimes in a disposition to unwarrantable interference, she considered it, in her actions—called up Margaret as soon as he had come to this second decision, so that if she were feeling disappointed at losing the opening of the convention, she should be relieved of any anxiety as to losing more of it.

Tia Elisa was, of course, ignorant of the change in Peyton's point of view, and so was doing her best to carry out his instructions, and to atone for what she regarded as her betrayal of his confidence. Rocking gently as she knitted, she reverted constantly in her talk, with what seemed to herself great adroitness, to Hugh and his virtues. Margaret was in a mood to listen kindly, for, at ease in a long chair, reading an occasional sentence from Candida between the intervals of Tia Elisa's gentle ripple of talk, the sweet sounds and scents of summer floating in to her through the open windows, life in Kentwick, with which Hugh was so intimately associated, seemed to her the happiest life the world could offer.

By half past four the heat, that through the afternoon had been too oppressive for any exercise, had begun sensibly to diminish. A little admonitory breeze, stealing in through the south windows, gently lifted the damp curls on Margaret's forehead and reminded her that the time for languid ease was over, and sent her running up stairs to don her riding-skirt in haste, if she would meet Hugh at the train, as she had proposed to herself to do,

and so save much time for their ride.

Once on old Nell's back, where she had not found herself for nearly two years, Selim following a little in the rear, ridden by Gaston, she was as full of energy as, for most of the afternoon, she had been full of lassitude. Old Nell bore her fifteen years bravely and after the first few minutes necessary in getting her stiffened joints into free working order, was as swift and delightful as in her younger days. She had been famous for her gaits in her youth, but trotting was not one of them; it was in her canter and in the cradle-like motion of her rack, that she excelled. So as soon as they had made the steep turn from the red gravel drive into the hard road of Le Beau Way and Margaret had laid the rein on the side of Nell's neck, she broke into a long easy lope that gave Margaret the sensation of skimming smoothly through the air on wings. As they turned the first right angle in Le Beau Way, they heard the whistle of the train at Franklin, only three miles off. A childish desire seized Margaret to beat the train to the station, and urging Nell to her swiftest pace they were soon flying by hedge, and stone wall, and overhanging trees, at such speed that the trumpet creeper hanging from all three in scarlet festoons, flashed by them like long pennons of flame.

As they turned into the short stretch of dark loam leading to the station, they slackened their pace a little, of necessity, since their horses' feet sank deep into the soft soil, and drawing rein at the horse-block under a spreading oak in the rear of the little station-house, Margaret gave Nell's bridle to Gaston to hold and ran into

the station-house for a minute's chat with Miss Molly before the train should arrive.

Miss Molly, as usual, was sitting enthroned in her low rocking-chair in one corner of her neat little waiting-room, her swift crochet-needle flashing in the sunlight, obedient apparently to no guidance but its own, as Miss Molly's eyes were fixed on the down-track to Franklin, watching for the five o'clock train. She turned as Margaret darkened the doorway.

"For the l-a-n-d-s *sake!*" ejaculated Miss Molly, too excited for a moment to do more than drop her work in her lap and open her mouth as wide as her eyes. But it would be a more startling apparition than Margaret that could deprive Miss Molly of the power of speech for more than a moment.

"W-e-l-l *Honey!* When did *you* get back? I've been lookin' and *longin'* for you all spring." And with the recovery of speech, Miss Molly came hastily forward to give Margaret the affectionate kiss, with which, since her babyhood she had greeted her return from long absence.

There was no lack of respect in the greeting, and there was no lack of affection in the manner in which Margaret received and returned it, for Miss Molly—looking hardly older than when the little Peggy had run in from her flower-decked ponies to make her anxious inquiry—was loved and honored by all the old county families dwelling within the radius tributary to Kentwick station.

"Still making table mats, Miss Molly? Whom are they for?" asked Margaret, glancing at the swift-flying needle that had resumed its flashing, even while Miss

Molly was still standing at Margaret's side, the greetings hardly over.

"For Mrs. Paxton," said Miss Molly, and then with sudden alarm—"But *there!* for g-o-o-d-n-e-s-s *sake!* mebbe they're a Christmas present for you, and I've gone an' told!"

"I hope so, they're so pretty, but I'm afraid not. However, if they should prove to be, I'll never 'peep,' so you needn't mind."

"Ridin' old Nell?" Miss Molly asked, glancing at Margaret's riding skirt. "Who've you come to meet—Mr. Peyton?"

Miss Molly was privileged to ask all the questions she liked—questions which it was universally recognized were not so much instigated by curiosity, as by a spirit of friendliness.

"Yes, old Nell, and I wish she could live forever. I'd almost forgotten how lovely she was to ride. I believe she grows better with age."

Margaret had answered the first question only, but if she had any idea of side-tracking Miss Molly by her eulogy of old Nell, she was disappointed. Miss Molly was too old a railroader to be switched on to a siding while the main track was still open.

"Did you say Mr. Peyton was comin' on the five o'clock? I thought he always came out in his automobile. We never catch a sight of him down here these days."

"He's coming out in it this afternoon," said Margaret, brought to bay, and wondering why she should hesitate

to say for whom she had come. Hadn't she often been down to the station to meet Hugh in the old familiar days? There certainly was no reason why she should color, as she felt herself doing, in answering Miss Molly's question more fully.

"I've come down to meet Mr. Kent; we're going for a little ride before dinner and I thought it might save time to meet him here."

The banality of such an explanation, which sounded quite as if she were apologizing to Miss Molly, struck Margaret as soon as she had made it. But Miss Molly took it quite as a matter of course.

"Oh, yes, I saw him go in on the two o'clock," she said, "an' I told him I thought he was takin' a hot afternoon for the Fair. He'll be that warm an' dusty when he gets here, a good long ride will make him feel good."

It had not struck Margaret until that minute that Hugh might easily want to stop at home and freshen up a bit before meeting her for their ride, and the train coming up at that moment, she watched rather anxiously whether there should be more pleasure or embarrassment in his first glance at her.

But he stepped from the train as immaculate as always, and she knew that he had found some place in town to do the freshening and so save time for their ride. Small as the matter was, it pleased her as an evidence of Hugh's clever management, almost more than it pleased her as an evidence of his eagerness.

"He's the kind of man I like," she murmured to herself, "he's so comfortable!"

There were always half a dozen or more men whom Margaret knew coming out on the five o'clock train from the city, and often some of the women of their families with them, but Hugh was the first to put foot on the platform standing on the lower step of the car, with his hand on the rail ready to swing off before the train should come to a full stop.

As his glance fell on the trim figure at the station-house door, the folds of her short blue riding-skirt gathered in one hand, her riding crop stiffly erect under the other arm, the dark blue of her four-in-hand tie contrasting with the crisp whiteness of her waist and harmonizing with the floating blue of the veil on her soft riding hat, he thought she had all the clearness and freshness in coloring of a Delft porcelain, and all the dainty grace of one from Sevres.

His eyes flashed only pleasure at sight of her, and in a moment he was at her side, thanking her for coming. They could not get away at once, for Margaret must stop a moment to speak to old friends and acquaintances who would welcome her back to Kentwick. But they were off at last, and turned their horses' heads toward Franklin.

The way from the little station led over the hills by scarcely more than a trail, through a scattered negro settlement, and then by a bridle path through the woods, coming out finally on the county road. The cabins of the negroes were some of them comfortable and neat, some of them squalid enough, but all of them picturesque and swarming with chickens and children. It was the

hour when the men were coming home from work, and either "washing up" on outside benches, or sitting at ease with corn-cob pipes on rude doorsteps, inhaling with the tobacco smoke the appetizing odors of corn-bread, bacon and coffee, coming through the open doors.

Everybody knew Hugh and Margaret, and the men looked up from their washing or their smoking with a smiling, "Howdy, Miss Peggy!" "Howdy, Marse Hugh!" while the children scrambled over each other in their rush for the pennies they knew were waiting for them in Marse Hugh's pocket.

The last cabin in the settlement was a little larger than the others, with more of an air of comfort; the cabin itself neatly whitewashed as was also the picket fence in front. It stood somewhat apart from the others on the edge of the woods, and French Jean, who lived there, had just driven into the yard with his wagon and a very good team of farm horses—he had evidently been helping in some of the wheat harvestings going on throughout the length and breadth of the valley. His horses were unhitched and he was leading them away to a rude barn behind the cabin, when hearing the sound of hoofs, he looked up. Seeing who it was, he let his horses walk off to the barn by themselves and ran quickly down to the road waving an arm to stop Margaret and Hugh.

"Hi! Marse Hugh, Hi! I'se got track on a possum, back in the South Woods!" he shouted as he ran.

They stopped their horses to wait for him to come up, and attracted by the shouting, a comely negro woman, in the cleanest of starched ginghams and brightest of tur-

bans, came to the door, holding in her hand the spatula with which she had been turning corn-cakes on the griddle, and, clinging to her dress on each side, two children, whose molasses-smeared faces showed for whom their mother had been turning the cakes.

"A possum!" breathed Margaret. "Oh, Hugh, what fun it would be to go on a possum hunt once more!"

Hugh turned and looked at her, her eyes were dancing with excitement.

"Would you go to-night, Margaret, if we could persuade Peyton and Helen to go too? It will be nearly full moon, just the time for it; but you know it may mean riding nearly all night before we tree him, and I'm afraid you won't feel fit to-morrow, if you want to go to the convention."

French Jean had come close enough by this time to overhear Hugh's rather discouraging speech, and he insinuated a counter argument:

"He'm a fine fat un, Marse Hugh, I know, coz I mos' cotched sight of him. An' I'se got a fine dog!"

Margaret gave her head a little shake, expressive of irritation either with herself or circumstances:

"Of course it's not to be thought of. Possum hunts can be had any time, and this may be my only chance at a political convention. I wouldn't miss another day of it for anything. And I know we couldn't persuade Peyton, he would think it utterly silly. He's forgotten that he ever spent a moonlight night riding after possums."

"I think myself it would be better to give it up for to-night," Hugh agreed, "but we'll go some time. Here,

French Jean," and he tossed him a silver half-dollar, "take that to console you, and keep on the lookout for another one—we'll be ready by the next full moon."

They rode on, but the clatter of their horses' hoofs on the stony trail was not loud enough to drown the rich, blatant, negro tones of French Jean's wife:

"Yoh fool! Why foh yoh doan go git that possum yohself! De sweet pertaturs am all ready to dig, an' my mouf jes' *watrin* foh possum gravy an' sweet pertaturs."

French Jean's wife caught the ring of Margaret's and Hugh's laugh, and she knew she had been overheard; but little she cared for that. And very likely, the saucy toss of her head with which she responded to it meant that she would have been disappointed if they had not overheard.

"French Jean," said Hugh, "would rather have had the couple of dollars he would have made from the hunt than the possum. He's a thrifty fellow; but Caroline would rather have the possum."

"I hope you don't lay that to the eternal feminine," said Margaret.

"Not a bit of it!" stoutly repudiated Hugh, "It's much more like the eternal masculine. I've always heard money charged as a woman's weakness, and 'victuals' a man's. Jean and Caroline seem to have changed parts."

They were entering the woodland bridle-path, and the semi-twilight under the green boughs and the mossy path beneath their horses' feet was a grateful contrast to

the glare of the afternoon sun and the unshaded rocky trail through the negro settlement; and the hush of the forest after the din of noisy negro voices was as grateful as the refreshing shade. The only sounds were the low twitter of robins making ready for the night, the indistinguishable stir of insect life, the faint and distant voices of children at their play, and the far-away cry, mellowed and musical, of a farm-hand calling to his cows.

Selim and Old Nell, brought close together by the narrowness of the path, rubbed noses affectionately, as they jogged along quietly, in equine sympathy with their surroundings, and the peace of the hour and of the quiet woods fell on Margaret and Hugh also.

Hugh was telling her of his afternoon at the Fair; of a picture that had specially attracted him, and of Guilmant's music.

"It took me back to the Trinité," said Hugh. "Percy Tremaine and I used to go there regularly Sunday afternoons at four. We had a standing invitation to sit in the organ loft and watch the old fellow's hands and feet—Percy was his pupil, you know." And then, with what seemed to Margaret a very abrupt transition:

"I like your friend Dalton immensely, Margaret."

"I can't quite claim that honor, much as I might like to be regarded as his friend," objected Margaret. "But why? What's the connection between Guilmant and Dalton?"

"Oh, no connection between them, but speaking of my afternoon at the Fair, reminded me of a little incident

that struck me as significant. I'd started for home and was hurrying along to catch my train. As I crossed the Plaza there was a crack regiment executing some manoeuvres that seemed to arouse great enthusiasm. I stopped a moment to look at them and, as it happened, beside two old farmers—from Pike County, I should think. They were quiet enough at first, but presently, at some particularly brilliant manoeuvre, their excitement got the better of them. They took off their hats, swung them around their heads and shouted at the top of their lungs. But what they shouted was—"*Hurrah for Dalton!*" And the special significance of it to me was, that without any preconcerted signal at all, they shouted it together in one breath, as if, when any excitement stirred them, it must find expression in the one great emotion of their souls. It's wonderful to stir people like that, Margaret. *I believe he's the coming man!*"

"Yes," said Margaret slowly, "it's wonderful!"

And then by some mental suggestion that she did not recognize, but that she might have traced back had she tried, she added:

"It's strange, Hugh, but all day long I've been feeling just nineteen years old. Do you remember that summer when there were six of us always together, riding, and driving, and having possum hunts, and picnics and week-end parties at each other's houses? I think it must be my departing youth tugging at my heart-strings that makes me go back to that summer so often to-day. I believe I don't like growing old, Hugh."

Margaret spoke half gaily, half wistfully. It was the

wistfulness that pierced Hugh's faithful heart like an arrow.

"Growing old, Margaret!" he repeated indignantly. "What nonsense! You look as young as you looked ten years ago, and you are twice as—" Hugh started to say "beautiful" but was afraid it sounded too bald—"nice" was his rather lame conclusion. For, if he had only known it, there was never a woman in the world that liked to be called "nice." "A nice girl," a "nice woman," is to be relegated to the ranks of the good but unattractive. Margaret, who had been used to such homage to her beauty and charm as amounted sometimes almost to adulation, was inclined to resent the word, but thought better of it, remembering that it was Hugh who had used it, and it must, therefore, to his mind, convey the highest praise. Instead she said nothing, and Hugh went on:

"What an old fellow you must think me! If your youth is departing, mine has gone long ago. I will soon be thirty-seven; does that seem dreadfully old to you?"

Margaret did not answer him directly.

"If I could always be riding through cool and dusky woods on dear Old Nell, I suppose I would always feel young," and she dismissed the subject with a smile and a sigh.

She did not say—"with you by my side," but somehow Hugh almost thought that was what her smile and sigh meant, and his pulses quickened as hope began to stir her wings.

From the time they had left the station they had been

gradually climbing a high and rocky ridge, but for some minutes they had been coming down the steep and winding descent on its other side. Now, almost at its foot, they had come upon a little "branch," the water in it very shallow at this time of the year, and half clogged by the leaves that the summer heat and summer storms had brought down thus early from sycamores and cottonwoods. Nell would not willingly let such a chance to cool her hot muzzle pass unimproved, and Margaret would not lightly deny her the luxury.

As they stopped for a minute, the two horses swashing their noses delicately, and playfully nipping at each other, Hugh took his courage in his hand.

"Margaret," he said, "that was a summer I can never forget. Shall we go back to it again this summer? And may I ask you again the question I asked you then for the first time? And will you answer it differently?"

Long custom could not harden Hugh sufficiently to keep his heart from tumultuous throbbing and his voice from trembling. Resolutely, every year through the ten, he had returned to the attack, never with any hope, but with a determination that would not allow him to despair as long as Margaret remained unmarried. And regularly through the ten years had Margaret treated his suit as though it could not possibly be serious—which made it easier for him, perhaps, since he knew it was her way of being kind, and that she knew only too well how serious it always was.

But this time, to his astonishment, there was no laughing scorn, and as Margaret had foreseen, his surprise al-

most eclipsed the joy of returning hope. She did not answer him for a minute, and then she lifted dim eyes to his.

"Dear Hugh," she said softly, "just as far as we can, we'll go back to that dear old summer; but do not ask me till the summer is over, and then—perhaps—my answer will be different."

The last words were almost a whisper, and Hugh could not answer them at all. He was shaken like a reed, now that the hope so long deferred seemed just within his grasp.

"Come," said Margaret, lifting Nell's nose from the water, "you and Selim have played long enough."

For the few rods that were left of the winding woodland path, Nell picked her way slowly down, one ear cocked back to listen for Selim and wondering why he did not follow. As they turned into the country road, Margaret looked back at Hugh, still motionless by the branch.

"It's too late to go to Franklin," she called. "Peyton and Helen must have arrived by this time. I'll beat you home."

At her word and a touch from her crop, Nell was off like an arrow, with Selim in hot pursuit. Now that she felt the die was so nearly cast, Margaret was seized with a wild gaiety, and Hugh, watching the trim blue and white figure on Nell's back, flying along the road just ahead of him, was filled with a strong excitement that showed itself in no excessive gaiety, but only in the deep and steady glow of his dark blue eyes.

Selim was soon abreast of Nell, and neck and neck they thundered along the hard macadam road; past negro cabins and stately country houses, past close-clipped hedges, enclosing well-kept lawns, and the white-washed paddock fences of a great stock-farm. Across the tracks of a suburban electric road they dashed recklessly, like two heedless children, without looking to see whether the murderous car was near; and then turned from the county road into a deep sunken lane skirting the golf links of the Kentwick Club, where the soft dirt road was pleasant to their horses' feet, and the green of overhanging hedges was pleasant to look up into.

The lane brought them out into the many-angled Le Beau Way at the rear of Beauvoir, and through an open gate they turned into a cornfield, along whose fence a road had been made for an easy access and to cut off the three long turns of Le Beau Way that enclosed the broad Beauvoir acres. Here, just ahead of them, they saw the motor-car; and Peyton, looking back at the thunder of hoofs and seeing the pace at which they were coming, turned on his power and joined the race.

Past the farm house they swept, with the farmer's wife and her children standing agape; past the vineyards and the orchards, turning at the great barns, where the men putting up the farm horses for the night stopped a moment to stare as they flashed by; past the gardens and ice-house and dairy; and then into the wide circle of the lawns at the rear of the house.

Tia Elisa, waiting for them on the piazza with her knitting, came around the corner of the house at the

noise of their arrival, and Gaston and another negro boy came running to take the horses. There was a medley of merry greetings and a laughing argument as to the respective merits of automobiles and horses, and then Peyton called up to Tia Elisa where she stood leaning over the railing of the side piazza and smiling down on them a general welcome:

"How are you feeling now, Tia Elisa?" He was keeping up his little ruse for Margaret's benefit.

"Very well, thank you," she answered with a conscious blush, and dropping her eyes to her knitting.

"Has Tia Elisa been sick?" asked Mrs. Paxton, soft sympathy in her tones.

Margaret had run up on to the piazza and was hurrying into the house to dress for dinner. She turned back at Helen's question.

"I don't think she has ever seemed better in her life than she has seemed to-day, Helen." She turned a smiling glance of comprehension on her brother as she added:

"But I forgive you, Peyton!"

And Peyton, as she turned again and ran laughing away, had the grace to blush as genuinely, if not as rosily, as Tia Elisa.

CHAPTER IX.

"GIVE US DALTON!"

When, at one o'clock the next day, Margaret found herself seated in a box in the vast convention hall, just back of the delegate's horseshoe, the tiers of seats reserved for visitors already densely packed, the light summer dresses of the women almost equaling the dark coats of the men, she found also that she was trembling with suppressed excitement.

Peyton and Helen were in the box, and Julie Delauney, and at Margaret's side was Hugh, making a brave effort to seem sufficiently indifferent in manner. If it had not been for Hugh's too ostentatious indifference, which unconsciously irritated her, she might have thought that day at Beauvoir a dream, so dim and hazy did all its experiences seem in the intense interest she was now feeling in the great political drama going on about her. Nor, thinking of it as a dream, would she have been quite able to determine whether to call it a pleasant one or a troubled one. Certain it is, that somewhere, deep in her subconsciousness, was a vague feeling of discontent; as if she were a tethered bird who might have no desire to fly, but who knew that when the desire should come there would be that ribbon—long, perhaps, and silken—but which would yet relentlessly set a limit to her flight.

Hugh had been all that she could have desired on the moonlight ride to town the evening before. He had

borne his part in the talk and laughter of the others with his usual good nature and open friendliness, only occasionally lapsing into short reveries that Margaret alone divined the cause for. He had said but one word referring in any way to the momentous episode of the afternoon, and that had been—taking advantage of a temporary absorption on the part of Helen and Peyton in each other—bending toward Margaret, and speaking in a tone so low as to reach only her:

"If we go back to that summer, I shall call you Peggy; I've never grown used to Margaret."

And Margaret had answered petulantly:

"Not at all! I don't like Peggy."

She had felt instantly sorry for the hurt look in Hugh's honest blue eyes, but she would not retract, though she tried to make amends by being kinder and gentler the rest of the ride, than had always been her wont withHugh

She was still trying to be "kind and gentle" with him—and it had occurred to her more than once to wonder why it should require an effort—while they were sitting together in the convention box waiting for the entrance of the delegates, and amusing themselves by commenting on many odd types in the audience, or exchanging greetings with friends and acquaintances who passed their box and sometimes stopped for a word or two.

Peyton, making himself agreeable to Helen and Julie in his usual impartial manner, let his eyes rest occasionally on his sister with a look of mingled tenderness and approbation, and it was a little harder for Margaret to stand that look than even to bear with Hugh's only half-

veiled adoration.

The look referred to a conversation of the morning. It had seemed to Margaret, all through the breakfast hour, that there was some constraint in Peyton's manner. She thought she understood it and was sorry for it, and did all in her power to remove it. For herself, her conscience was clear, and she felt perfectly at ease with Peyton and all the world. But not until the maid had removed the coffee—a signal that she would not return to the dining-room while they were at the table—did Peyton lay down his paper, and with an evident effort, broach the subject that was in both their thoughts.

"Margaret, what did you think of me? Were you furious?"

"Very, for a while." Margaret smiled a little. "Then I remembered that it was only your over anxiety for me, and that I must make great allowance for a crotchety old bachelor."

Peyton only faintly returned the smile:

"How did you discover me? Tia Elisa certainly said she had a headache."

"I suspected you, and I trapped her into a betrayal. She was seized with such remorse when she discovered I had missed the convention, that she gave you away unwittingly. Then, of course, she was still more remorseful. But I was practically sure of it before. Don't you think—Peyton—it was a little—unnecessary?"

"I've no doubt it was entirely so," said Peyton gravely, "but it is as you say, Margaret, I am over anxious and I am crotchety. My little sister is the dearest thing in

life to me, and I could not bear to think of her getting interested in the wrong direction."

Then Peyton hesitated still more—"Do you know, Margaret, I have come to think—just lately, almost within the last few days—that Hugh is your best chance for happiness. He's not as brilliant as many of the men you have known, and I suppose from having known him always, and because we played together as boys, I have naturally underestimated him. All those proverbs about 'a prophet not without honor,' and 'familiarity breeds contempt,' are true as gospel."

"One of them being gospel," interjected Margaret demurely.

"No! Is it really? Which one?" asked Peyton, naively surprised.

But Margaret was too deeply concerned in what Peyton had been saying to allow him to be diverted from his theme. Much as she might shrink from such an intimate discussion of her affairs, she had been too troubled about them herself not to be glad now of her brother's counsel.

"Oh, never mind," she answered him, "the important matter is, that you should think I'm in danger of missing the best life has to offer, and that you feel so deeply about it as to take rather extraordinary measures. Is it, Peyton, that I am growing old and unattractive, and to speak vulgarly—that you think I am missing my best 'chances' and will soon be where there will be no more to miss? Don't you know how we have both always said that there must be one *right* one, and when the right one comes we would be sure to know? And have you

forgotten, Peyton, or have you changed your mind?" Margaret spoke more slowly, hesitating a little, "If the right one never came, you and I were to live together always, and to make life as rich and full for ourselves and for each other as if he had come."

Peyton looked across at her as she spoke, her arms resting on the table, her hands lightly clasped as she leaned forward a little, looking up at him earnestly.

"Would that satisfy you, Margaret? Wouldn't life be rather dull with an old fellow like me?" he asked wistfully.

"I can't think of life being dull as long as there are pictures, and books, and music, and flowers, and trees, and birds, and hills, and rivers; to say nothing of friends and neighbors and—you! Don't be worried about me, Peyton—I think I would make a very happy and contented old maid."

Margaret spoke gaily at the last. She was afraid dear old Peyton was *too* anxious about her—she would divert him from his seriousness. But Peyton was not to be diverted.

"I'm not worrying about your being an old maid, Margaret," he said as gravely as before, "I am worrying lest you find yourself interested in the wrong man. It was that fear that made me see Hugh in a new light."

Margaret was annoyed, and showed it by a heightened color.

"I suppose I know to whom you are referring, but it seems to me unwarrantable, and, if you will excuse the word—almost ill-bred—to be fearing any such result of

a bare acquaintanceship. There are reasons, of course, why I should find him interesting, as a man who has figured so largely in national affairs and drawn the attention of the whole country upon himself, but there is no reason at all why he should feel any particular interest in me, and in suggesting it, you make me feel like a rustic little village flirt who sees a possible 'beau' in every man she meets."

Margaret spoke with asperity, and Peyton shrugged his shoulders and smiled whimsically, with something of the air of a whipped school-boy.

"Oh, I suppose I *am* like a fond mamma, who thinks every man who speaks to her beautiful daughter is dead in love with her. But you know, Margaret, I have some ground for fear, since experience has taught me that no man is safe who comes within the circle of your attraction."

Peyton's eyes twinkled as he said it; he knew how little Margaret liked such speeches.

"Nonsense!" was the only answer she deigned him, and Peyton went on more seriously:

"I'm going to talk to you, Margaret, as if I were indeed a fond mamma. I know of no one who has a better right to counsel you, and no subject on which it is more fitting that we should take counsel together."

And then very gravely, very earnestly, very tenderly, Peyton set forth at length the reasons why it would be most fitting that she should marry Hugh: his life-long devotion to her, the simple nobility of his character, the charm of his manner. And he did not hesitate even to

place before her the more material advantages of such a marriage: Hugh's family and their own had been closely associated for a hundred years, and his wealth and social position were such as Margaret had a right to demand in a husband. That the Kentwick acres touched on one side the Beauvoir acres was also a pleasant item and worthy of consideration.

As Peyton began to talk, Margaret drew a daisy from the Delft bowl that decorated the center of the table—brilliant gold and white field daisies, a great bunch of which they had brought from Beauvoir the night before. Some of the long stems stood crisply upright among their delicate green foliage, and some of them drooped gracefully over the sides of the bowl in such wide arches that, reaching beyond the lace of the center-piece on which the bowl stood, their petals were reflected in the polished mahogany as in a woodland pool. The careless grace of the arrangement affected Margaret like a bit of the country, and transported her in spirit to the Beauvoir meadows. As Peyton talked, she listened with downcast eyes and steadily deepening color, pulling off one by one the white petals. Was she saying to herself as she plucked—"Un peu, beaucoup, passionément, pas de tout"—Peyton wondered, and if so, was it of Hugh she was thinking?

She was silent for a moment as he finished speaking, and Peyton regarded her anxiously. He was not quite sure whether his high-spirited sister would brook what she might consider interference in her affairs; and he very much disliked coming in conflict with her on any subject,

when, as he ruefully acknowledged, she usually got the best of him.

He was greatly relieved, therefore, at the gentleness of her tone, as with eyes still downcast and plucking nervously at a second daisy—not now with any method in the manner of it—she answered him:

"Thank you, Peyton. I recognize the truth in what you have said, and I appreciate your saying it; I know it was not easy for you. I like Hugh very much indeed—you know that. And—and—" lifting her eyes bravely to Peyton, but with burning cheeks, she spoke with assumed lightness—"I'm thinking of giving him a trial this summer."

It was this conversation of the morning, and most of all Margaret's concluding speech, that made Peyton's glances rest so tenderly and with such approbation on his sister sitting in the box by Hugh's side. Margaret understood the glances and winced under them.

But the delegates were beginning to come in now, and all her attention was absorbed by them; she had no longer any thoughts for either Hugh's adoration or Peyton's glances.

As one state delegation after another entered the hall in close column, and took its place about the state banner bearing its name, Margaret's pulses quickened. She was curiously excited, and hardly understood why. It seemed to her scarcely possible that it was only two days since she had seen Mr. Dalton. That intervening day at Beauvoir had stretched itself out like an interim of weeks, and she was conscious of feeling the excitement

one would naturally feel in the expectation of seeing at any moment the face of an old friend for a long time absent.

The great hall, packed with its thousands, every seat even to the uppermost tier filled, and every aisle and window space and doorway crowded with men patiently wedged together in the hot and breathless air, added to her excitement. It seemed to her that they too were waiting with tense nerves for something to happen or some one to come. It surprised her to discover that there was nothing of this quiver of anticipation in the others in her box; they were talking together as lightly and easily as if they were waiting for the curtain to rise at the play, and it jarred on her as strangely incongruous.

Presently, the young graduate who had been with them at The Southern, strolled by their box, and seeing who was occupying it, turned and came back, with alert greetings for them all. As he shook hands with Margaret he said to her:

"Is'nt this great, Miss Le Beau! Were you here yesterday?"

Margaret had to confess she was not; she was out of town.

"Oh, you missed a lot," he said enthusiastically. "Walter's opening speech was fine! You should have heard him score the President!"

His excitement was pleasant to Margaret, it seemed to give countenance to her own. She asked him to sit down, and, as on the evening at The Southern, he at once began to point out the men of distinction—leaders

of delegations, state bosses, chairmen of committees, party whips—he seemed to know them all. Margaret enjoyed it thoroughly.

"What a delightful young fellow!" she murmured in Hugh's ear.

But in the very act of telling a good story about the temporary chairman, the young collegian caught sight of the debutante who had been a member of their party at The Southern, and finishing his story hurriedly and rather lamely, he excused himself and joined her in the next box.

Margaret laughed:

"He's charming! But do you suppose he'll have to go through it all again over there?"

"Oh, I hope they'll let him," returned Hugh, "He'll be so disappointed if they don't. I think if you listen, in about two minutes you'll hear that story about Walters."

Sure enough, the two minutes were not up when the high, clear tones of the young collegian penetrated to their box above the confused murmur of many voices:—"By the way, I heard a good story about Walters this morning—"

They heard no more, for Mr. Seton came up at that moment and was cordially greeted by Margaret . nd Hugh and by Helen. Peyton's greeting was no more cordial than courtesy demanded, but Julie was all smiles and fluttering excitement, as she made room for him to bring a chair beside hers. Seton was brim full and running over with enthusiasm.

"Dalton's delegation is just coming in," he said excitedly. "I left them at the corner and ran to get ahead of them. I wouldn't miss seeing the grand entry for anything."

Up to this time as each delegation had entered, there had been more or less applause from galleries and boxes, but nothing that had struck Margaret as worthy of being called by so fine a name as Mr. Seton had used.

"Why do you call it a grand entry?" she asked him. "Will it be so much finer than the others?"

"You were not here yesterday, Miss Le Beau," he returned. "He had quite an ovation, wouldn't you have called it so, Miss Delauney?"

"Yes, indeed!" answered Julie enthusiastically. "There was nothing else to compare with it. I'm so sorry you missed it, Margaret."

Margaret was sorry too, but the keenness of her regret lasted but for a minute. There was a sudden stir of expectancy; a thrill of excitement ran through the vast audience. Every head was turned, with necks craned back towards the center door, kept free for the entrance of delegates.

The upper tier caught sight of him first. A great roar sprang from the throats of the thousands of sturdy men in that high gallery. It was caught up by the next lower tier, and the next, wave after wave of thunderous sound, till galleries, boxes, delegates, reporters: ten thousand strong men and dainty women were on their feet waving flags, hats and handkerchiefs, and like one great voice, shaking the vast dome with their mighty shout—"Dal-

ton!" "Dalton!" "Dalton!"

Margaret was caught up in the cyclone of excitement, and standing on tip-toe was strenuously waving high above her head the bit of white cambric she called her handkerchief. So were Helen and Julie. Even Peyton found himself, by no will of his own, on his feet and occasionally waving his hat in half-hearted fashion. But Hugh was swinging his around his head in wide circles, and his stentorian tones shut out every other voice from Margaret's ears—"Dalton!" "Dalton!" "Dalton!"

Only Seton neither waved his hat nor shouted. He stood with the others, but he was pale, and trembling with excitement. The delegation had advanced far enough down the aisle by this time to come within Margaret's line of vision. Dalton walked at the head of it, his leonine head, erect on his broad shoulders, thrown slightly back as he lifted his eyes to the galleries, and his face illuminated with an emotion too strong to be called a smile. As he came into the view of each new segment of the circle of spectators heretofore shut off from seeing him by being on the side where he was entering, a fresh wave of sound swelled up, adding volume to the great roar, till like a mighty eygre it swept resistlessly to the dome in one great cry—"Dalton!" "Dalton!" "Dalton!"

As the delegation took its place about its state banner —every member of it swelling with pride in the triumph of their leader—Dalton turned, and swept with his glance, first the high gallery, then the lower tiers, then the boxes. Last of all his glance fell on Margaret. He knew just where to look for her; he had located her box

the day before by Julie Delauney's presence in it, and he had noticed her absence with a keen disappointment that had surprised himself. Now his glance met hers, it seemed to Margaret, as directly as if they had been standing but a few feet from each other; and it seemed to her also, that it brought a special message for her alone. His grey eyes, dark with the glow of strong feeling, looked straight into hers, and she returned the look with more of her soul in her own than she knew. It was but a moment; his glance swept on, and Margaret, feeling now, like Seton, too deeply for any outer manifestation of enthusiasm, let her hand with its fluttering white handkerchief fall at her side, and sank back into her chair pale and trembling while the mighty roar around her grew deeper and stronger—"Dalton!" "Dalton!" "Dalton!"

Frank Seton turned toward her. It would have been folly to try to speak in such a tempest, but he took out his watch and pointed to five minutes before two and showed her that the hands were now six minutes past. For eleven minutes that mighty uproar had been going on and there were no signs of its abating. Men were leaping up on railings, on window sills, on the tables of the reporters, urging on the shouting with wild and frantic gestures. In vain the chairman pounded the desk with his gavel; he might as well have been a phantom chairman pounding on thin air, as far as any sound of his gavel was heard, or as far as any respect was shown to his authority.

And now there was a new note in the uproar. Far up

in the high gallery, a tall sinewy Westerner, with a voice like a bugle call, leaning far over and waving a great flag, shouted—"Give us Dalton!" "Give us Dalton!" Instantly the lower tiers, the boxes, the thousands on the floor took it up—"Give us Dalton!" "Give us Dalton!"

To Margaret's excited senses it sounded like the longing cry of one vast hungry heart. It seemed to her directed straight to the horseshoe of delegates, and she did not believe there was a body of men in the world who could resist the importunate pleading of that cry—"Give us Dalton!" "Give us Dalton!"

The response from the delegates was almost instantaneous. A delegate from one of the Western states picked up his state standard, ran across the aisle with it, and planted it firmly beside the standard of Dalton's state. Instantly an eastern delegation, as one man, rushed to place their standard by the other two. Then state after state followed, from the East, from the West, from the South; from far Hawaii to Porto Rico; the cries of the delegates themselves growing every minute more frantic and the great roar from the galleries growing steadily stronger—"Give us Dalton!" "Give us Dalton!"

Seton took out his watch and once more in dumb show indicated to Margaret—"Eighteen minutes and no signs of subsiding!" He was no longer pale, his face was radiant. To him there seemed now no doubt of the ultimate result, and to Margaret too, Hugh's words seemed already verified—"He is the coming man."

But now she perceived men quietly passing about

among the delegates, and she recognized them to be men the young collegian had pointed out as party whips and state bosses. She felt a keen anxiety as she watched them, she hardly knew why, but when Seton turned and looked at her, she saw her anxiety reflected and deepened in his face. The joyous, radiant confidence was gone, though he made a gesture of bold defiance, as if daring the machine to do its worst, since the hearts of the people were with Dalton.

It seemed to Margaret also, a moment later, that the delegates were wavering, that the insidious work of the party whips was having its effect. They were no longer so frantic, and here and there a delegation had almost ceased its shouting. Not that the roar around her had lessened in the least. If possible it was growing stronger with that rhythmic cry, like the pulsation of a great heart—"Dalton! Dalton! Give us Dalton!"

Suddenly a delegate from a southern state forced his way through the crowd to the platform bearing a great banner with Berkeley's face on it. For an instant there was almost silence under the vast dome, then the uproar broke out again more frantic than before. There were counter cries now, for "Berkeley!" "Berkeley!" "Berkeley!" And the states that had not gathered around Dalton began to press to the platform and plant their standards beside the Berkeley banner. All the more frantically from the galleries came cries for Dalton, and as some of the states that had gathered about him—states that had come to the convention instructed for Berkeley but had been borne away on the tide of pop-

ular enthusiasm to Dalton's side—now returned to their duty, and slunk away to join the Berkeley forces on the platform, pandemonium broke loose. Yells, cat-calls, "Berkeley!" "Dalton!" the incessant pounding of the gavel, the imploring gestures of the chairman striving to restore order; the party whips driving reluctant delegations to take their stand by Berkeley; the frantic cries of the galleries—as they saw delegations drawing away from their idol—drowning the Berkeley cries as the roar of Niagara drowns the waters of the mill-dam; it seemed to Margaret, wrought to the highest pitch of excitement, that it was more than she could endure. Then gradually, no one knew why or how, the tumult quieted itself. The thud of the gavel began to make itself heard, and at last, with a voice hoarse from ineffectual cries, the chairman called the house to order.

Seton showed Margaret his watch once more. For twenty-nine long minutes, that vast audience had roared Dalton's name!

"Was it like this yesterday?" Margaret asked Seton, for now she could make herself heard.

"Oh, no! That was nothing to this." And then with glowing eyes, and a voice whose solemn intensity gave it the effect of awe he added—

"Miss Le Beau, there was never anything in the world like this! This was no work of a machine—*it was the voice of the people!*"

CHAPTER X.

PUT TO THE TEST.

"'The voice of the people is the voice of God' isn't it?"

Up to this moment Julie had found no chance to say anything to Seton. She was not going to lose this first opening, and if she flippantly minced in where reverent step was due, how was Seton, a mere man, and a rarely guileless one where women were concerned, to know that. He thought she showed unusual perceptions for such a child, as he still persisted in considering her, though Margaret, her junior by a year, made no such impression of youth upon him.

He turned to her now and they entered at once upon a half intimate conversation, that set Margaret to wondering at the advance in the terms of their acquaintance, for she had not known that they had spent the afternoon before, while she was at Beauvoir, together in her box at the convention.

"How did *that* impress you, Peyton? What do you think of him now?" Hugh called across to the other side of the box where Peyton was sitting, forgetting for a moment that Seton was Dalton's bosom friend and no free expression of opinion before him was possible.

But Peyton did not forget.

"It was wonderful! I never saw its like!" he answered politely, and turned again to Mrs. Paxton.

The note of cool aloofness in Peyton's tone warned Hugh, and he sought in Margaret the sympathy he was sure of, for his ardent soul was now all aflame with admiration of the man who, he was convinced, was not coming but had arrived.

The man himself, the center of all eyes, the pivot of all thoughts, sat in his place, outwardly unperturbed, inwardly his soul in a tumult. He had not failed to recognize the significance of his desertion by the delegations for Berkeley. The greatness of his ovation had surprised him as much as he knew it must have astounded the party leaders. He had always believed the rank and file of the party to be with him, but anything so universal, so overwhelming as this demonstration, had not entered his thoughts. He knew that for a while the great machine itself must have been stunned; must have feared that it was all wrong in its calculations; that Dalton still held the party in his thrall, and could at any moment, by the magic of his personality, sweep away the carefully planned and intricately worked out wheels and connecting bands of the machine.

The mistake had been that the ovation had continued too long. It had given the whips a chance to recover from their stupefaction, and to get to work on counter lines. Of course it had not escaped Dalton's keen glance —though he had not so good a place for observation as Margaret—that the party whips were moving about from delegation to delegation, persuading some, threatening others, until they had finally licked them, partially at least, into shape. It was a little comfort

that the delegations had not deserted him voluntarily, but under compelling stress; and some of them, at least, openly sulky.

Yet the elation, the exaltation of soul with which he had listened to that mighty roar of acclamations, watching the wild enthusiasm sweeping over the mass like a great tidal wave, had left him, and left him in a corresponding state of depression.

He was a born fighter, who loved the din of conflict, and most of all loved to wrest victory from defeat; but there was slowly settling upon him the conviction, that it was not with hearts of flesh and blood he was now to deal. Long experience had given him the right to trust in his power of moulding men to his will by the magic of his voice and the eloquence of his oratory; but he had no weapons with which to contend against inanimate, unimpressionable, and relentless forces of organization and political cunning.

In a preliminary meeting of the Resolutions Committee the night before, he had given Jim Burton to understand that he was not to be moved from his purpose to get his anti-trust plank into the platform; nor could he be induced in any way to modify it. He had been given to understand in return, that it was now war to the knife between him and the machine, and that no means would be left untried that could contribute to his downfall. This afternoon he had been conscious of a grim sense of triumph in witnessing the helplessness and stupefaction of the great leaders before the overwhelming expression of the people's will, but it had left him

with as grim a sense of defeat to own to himself finally that the party lash had still power to whip the voting body into subjection.

He was nerving himself now for a supreme effort. In a few minutes the report of the Credentials Committee would be called and his power to control the votes of the delegates would be put to the test. Although refusing a place on the Credentials Committee because he would not give up what he considered his far more important position on the Resolutions Committee, he had yet consented to accept the proxy of a member of that committee, and to present to the convention the minority report in behalf of those unseated delegates whom Margaret had witnessed making such a strong plea for his help at The Southern.

Their cause was just—there was no doubt of that—but Dalton was wondering just now whether he had been wise to put matters to the touch so early in the history of the convention. Defeat in this would mean much to him now; the machine no doubt would make it the test of his strength, and until this moment he had not realized how completely the convention was dominated by the machine. It was too late now to go back on his promise. Those fellows were trusting him, and he must do the best for them possible, but he began to feel a nervousness very unusual to him, as he sat there mentally running over the line of argument he was to use, and at the same time vividly picturing to himself the probabilities of defeat and the disastrous consequences that would surely follow.

There was no question of the justice of their cause:

the country had thrilled with indignation at the gag-rule methods of the convention that had sent another list of delegates to sit in their seats. And now the Credentials Committee was approving the iniquitous methods of the gag-rule gang; no, there was no question of the justice of their cause—but Dalton was beginning to doubt the expediency of his championing it.

Then there flashed into his mind a vivid question: What have you to do with expediency? It is for you to champion the right and the cause of the unjustly oppressed, let the result be what it may!

From that moment his soul was quiet and he awaited with calmness the report of the Credentials Committee which his would immediately follow.

Up in the box, Seton was keeping them instructed in the progress of events. He was interpreter in general to them of the occult significance of many little incidents, that, but for his enlightening, might have been lost to them. Peyton and Hugh, of course, being men, had slight need of his services; a strenuous devotion night and morning to the daily papers, having kept them intelligent in political affairs. Margaret too, understood most of what was going on around her, being of that rare species of young woman a reader of the front page and the editorials in the morning dailies. But Helen was frankly ignorant, and Julie, if she was not, pretended to be, insisting that she never read anything but the death notices and society news, and appealing with bewitching childlikeness to Seton's superior intelligence.

It was due to his explanations that Margaret under-

stood how much was at stake in Dalton's presentation of the minority report, and her eyes followed him as he rose from his seat and started for the platform, with almost as intense an interest at Seton's.

"I begged him not to undertake it," Seton turned instinctively to Margaret when he had anything to say about Dalton, "There's too much at stake! But Dalton's a little of a quixote, and besides, he would not believe how much under Jim Burton's thumb the convention is. I've no doubt he sees it now, but he'll never own himself beaten till the last gun's fired."

Seton turned back to follow Dalton with anxious eyes, his jaw set in grim lines that betrayed the intensity of his feeling.

Something of the same grim intensity characterized the whole body of delegates as they silently watched Dalton making his way to the platform—his head erect, his eyes luminous, with a pallor that betrayed his consciousness that this was to be a supreme and final effort: that it meant to him politically, victory or death.

There was scarcely a sound of applause from the delegates—not even from his friends among them—though the galleries could never see him rise to his feet without breaking into wild cries of adoration. They were still shouting his name when he began to read his report, but they quieted instantly; for careless and inattentive as the house might be to much that went on on the platform, there was no one, whether friend or foe, who wanted to lose a word of the silver-tongued orator, knowing well that every word he uttered was significant, and of rare

force and eloquence.

The report itself was long, setting forth in full the merits of the case, and so clearly, that Margaret, who had known but little of it before, now comprehended it fully. At its close, listened to in a silence that was wonderful in such a vast and restless audience, Dalton turned to the chairman and moved to substitute his minority report for the majority report, and requested also time for debate.

Then followed a tragic hour. Seldom has the world seen such a spectacle: a man of imperial personality, wielding all the weapons of keen logic, forceful argument, brilliant rhetoric, impassioned appeal, rousing to wildest enthusiasm the thousands who heard him, yet hurling his wonderful personality and his powerful oratory against that solid body of delegates as against a wall of stone.

The people were with him. If they could have had their way, they would have given him his will to the uttermost. They broke out into a delirium of adulation when he spoke, they drowned with hisses the speakers on the other side. When he rose for the second time to close the debate, the vast hall was almost breathless. He had but a few minutes in which to sum up the case, and he ended by making a pungent appeal to the delegates not to let the men who had deserted the party four years before, come back to gag and bind it now to their corrupt will.

When he sat down roaring frenzy followed, and it was long before the chairman could get the house sufficiently

"When Dalton rose for the second time to close the debate, the vast hall was almost breathless."

quiet to take the vote.

Dalton had taken his seat with his state delegation, and in leaving the platform his glance had once more sought Margaret. He knew that he had never spoken with more of the divine fire, and he believed that the consciousness of her presence and her intense sympathy had been part of his inspiration. At least he would see if he had been right in assuming the sympathy. His eyes had a way of projecting his soul across space, and Margaret, sitting in her box, felt across the intervening heads of the delegates that lightning-like flash with its keen inquiry, and felt herself also powerless to restrain the quick response of her own eyes. She watched him take his seat, saw his friends in the delegation crowd around him with congratulating hands and smiles, and then, as the uproar began to diminish, and the delegates get into place for voting, she saw Dalton settle back in his seat, and she thought she could distinguish, even from where she sat, the tense lines deepening about the firm mouth and chin.

There was a momentary hush of expectation as the chairman rose to put the question. The strain of the moment was too much for Seton—he leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his face buried in his hands. The question was responded to by a respectable volume of ayes; Seton breathed easier. But a thunder of noes followed hard after, drowning the ayes too overwhelmingly for any chance of mistake. Seton groaned audibly and lifted a white face to Margaret:

"Why did he do it!" His tone was a hoarse whisper.

"I begged him not to—there was too much at stake to force their hand so early in the game."

Margaret could give him no comfort; she was herself unaccountably and horribly depressed, and wondered how Peyton and Helen could, at that moment, laugh lightly at the futile efforts of a young fellow to get out of the crush he was in—resulting finally, in his clambering up a sturdy countryman as he might have climbed a tree, and walking over the shoulders of the good-natured crowd.

There was a stir among the delegates. Dalton was again on his feet, and the frantic galleries, which had broken forth at that thunderous "No!" into wild demonstrations of sympathy and disgust, quieted instantly.

"Mr. Chairman, I ask for a roll-call of the delegations."

Dalton spoke quietly, but there was something—it did not amount to a tremor, but it was an unusual vibration in the rich tones—that cut to the heart every friend who heard it. When, ever before, had they seen their hero quail!

Up to this moment, Dalton had not believed that he could not *compel* that body of men by the force of his logic and the fire of his oratory. Up to this moment, he had not fully realized that it was not *men* he was talking to, but a bloodless organization—an inanimate and deadly machine.

Steadily the dismal roll-call went on. But as Dalton heard state after state, that he had confidently relied upon, swung over to the enemy, many of them by the fatal unit rule, his eyes darkened and began to glow, the

color came again into his cheek, and by the time the roll-call was ended his whole air breathed indomitable courage and defiance. Margaret, watching him intently, and noting how the grand head had taken on a prouder pose, and catching a little of the flash of the grey eyes, whispered to Seton:

"Look at Mr. Dalton! All can not be lost."

But Seton shrugged his shouders whimsically, half irritation, half pride in the gesture:

"The trouble with Dalton is, he never knows when he's beaten. He's got some new scheme in his brain now, I can see!"

And then, as one who has already had more than he can bear, he shook his head humorously, indicating portentous gloom, as he muttered:

"Oh lordy! I wonder what he's up to now!"

CHAPTER XI.

DALTON'S SCHEME.

What Dalton might be up to, it was very certain Seton would know before long. In a few minutes the convention had adjourned. The leaders felt that they had accomplished enough in one afternoon in the defeat of Dalton, and they did not think it wise to give that irrepressible phœnix time to rise from his ashes.

Seton excused himself to go down and speak to Dalton and if he might, he said, he would like to bring him up to the box for a few minutes. Hugh who overheard the request, added an urgent invitation to Margaret's polite one, and the others, overhearing Hugh, it was made cordially unanimous.

Seton was not sure that Dalton would have even a few minutes to spare, and when he delivered the invitation Dalton at first thought it would be impossible to accept it. He shrank nervously from meeting these people in whose eyes he frankly confessed to himself he wished to shine, and who had just been witness to his defeat. Then he decided that the feeling was an unworthy one, and moreover he greatly desired to meet Margaret again, for in the crowding of events and engrossing interests of the last two days, Mrs. Paxton's high tea, where he had last seen her, seemed to have receded into a dim perspective of distance.

They were all frankly glad to see him in the box, and

the pretty little air of pride in entertaining so great a man which the ladies put into their cordial greetings, went far towards restoring him to his ease. Even Peyton was too much of a thorough-bred not to feel sympathy for the man that was down, and too well-bred to express the sympathy in words. Dalton was grateful to him for what he left unsaid, and for the first time found something to like in Margaret's cynical brother.

For the first time also, Peyton found himself stirred in his emotions towards Dalton by the plucky fight the man was making, and when Hugh diffidently preferred his request for a week of Dalton's time after the convention, Peyton seconded him with more genuine cordiality than he had hitherto displayed towards Dalton. A cordiality of which he repented later, however, since it was visibly the clinching argument for Dalton in favor of his acceptance, and when Peyton had taken time to reflect he saw at once there could be no greater menace to his plans for Margaret than this visit of Dalton to Hugh.

Much had to be crowded into the few minutes Dalton had to spare, for everyone wanted a chance to express his interest and admiration. There were incessant calls for him from all parts of the house, and men, with their hungry eyes fastened on the box, were evidently waiting to seize him the moment he should be free. It made Margaret quite nervous for him, and she was ready to cut short the visit she had at first desired.

But if Dalton felt hurried, he showed no signs of it, and if he did not really linger, he gave all the effect of it in the rare deliberateness of his manner. He found a

chance to say to Margaret—for the uproar around them made a perfect seclusion:

"You have not forgotten that you are my mascot?"

"A very poor one I am afraid you think, if we are to judge from the vote."

"Oh, that was as well as I could expect. But it is for the platform I bespoke your services. The Committee on Resolutions meets to-night, and if I succeed in getting in my resolution I shall give you the highest certificate as a mascot in good standing."

There was something very winning in his smile as he said the foolish words. It seemed to Margaret to have very divergent characteristics: the gentle raillery of an older man unbending to youth, and the diffident wistfulness of one who had been hurt and was timidly asking for sympathy.

This last touched Margaret greatly in so strong a man, and she hastened to say:

"I will do my best, but you are sure to win and without any help from me."

It was twenty minutes later when Dalton, who had finally shaken off the last importunate interviewer, seized Seton's arm and made his way through the yelling crowd that packed the streets around the Convention Hall to the curb.

"Come," he said, as he drew him down a quiet side street, "It's six o'clock; at seven the sub-committee meets and at nine the committee, and I've made an engagement with at least a dozen men at my room before either. I must have a talk with you first. We'll find a

little café somewhere around here and talk while we eat."

Neither of them knew the neighborhood, but by good chance they lighted on their quiet café and ordered a "ready to serve" supper of frugal proportions. They had the room almost to themselves, and the two or three other people who were taking their evening meal there at the same hour, evidently did not recognize the leading figure of the convention in one of the two men conversing so earnestly in low tones over their supper.

The waiter had placed before them a platter of cold meat, a plate of rolls, a pot of coffee and a bottle of milk, and left them to themselves while he hastened to secure a more promising couple just entering.

"John," said Frank, "What is it? I know you have some new scheme; I saw when it came into your mind during the roll-call of the delegations. But whatever it is, *don't* antagonize Jim Burton any more if you can help it. He's going round now with murder in his eye."

"I'm not trying to antagonize him—I don't care *that* for Jim Burton!" But as Dalton snapped his fingers contemptuously, his eyes flashed in a way to betray that he cared more than he knew. "It's no new scheme, Frank; but that roll-call showed me just where I stood. I have nothing to hope for from this convention—you were right, it's under Jim Burton's thumb—but what you saw in my face during the roll-call was only a renewal of an old resolve *to beat him on the platform or die in the attempt.* If I came here with any feeble hopes of a nomination, they're all gone now—that vote settled them. And the pity of it is," he added with his whimsical smile,

"I care twice as much about it now as I did before I came."

Frank gave him a quick glance of ready comprehension, and the noticeable part of it was that there was neither alarm nor disapproval in the glance, but a kind of sneaking sympathy instead. Which was remarkable, since he must have recognized in Dalton's whimsical smile that it was the thought of Margaret that made it harder to give up his hopes.

Dalton went on:

"What I want you to do is to see these men, if possible, before nine o'clock; before seven, some of them. I've made you out a list. They're on the Resolutions Committee, and I want you to talk as you've never talked before in favor of that trust plank. You know all the arguments as well as I do."

Then just to be sure that Seton had them all well in hand, he went over the points with him, jotting down little memoranda on the back of an old envelope; the glance of his eyes clear, cold, business-like; the tones of his voice firm, strong, inspiring, in striking contrast to Seton whom the events of the afternoon had left listless and depressed.

Seton was bolstering himself up with strong coffee, but Dalton was drinking only milk, and as he finished his instructions his friend regarded him curiously.

"What time did you get to bed last night, John?" he asked abruptly.

"I don't know; it was after three when I left the Credentials Committee."

"Up at six as usual, I suppose?"

Dalton nodded.

"When do you expect to get to bed to-night?"

"Not at all," answered John promptly. "But why this catechism?"

"Well, I was wondering what stuff you were made of, and how you expect to keep awake without coffee."

"Keep awake!" and John laughed. "No trouble about that; I'll have enough to keep me awake to-night I fancy. Jim Burton will look out for that. The trouble will be to get to sleep if I should happen to have a chance to try. But come on, Frank—" rising and brushing the crumbs from his coat as he spoke—"I'm off for the field and the biggest fight of my life."

He looked up a moment, and laid his hand on his friend's arm.

"Frank," he said, "I'll be honest with you now—I wasn't quite honest a while ago. You were right—a new scheme did flash into my mind while they were calling the roll of delegations. I was tempted to only half fight it out in the Committee to-night, and if I lost my trust plank, bring in a minority report before the convention to-morrow. Do you realize what that would mean?"

Frank started as if an electric current had passed from Dalton's arm to his. He was wide enough awake now; listlessness and dejection were all gone.

"Do I realize what it would mean! By heavens, John, it would mean your nomination! You would carry the convention by storm! You would sweep them off their

feet as you swept them four years ago. A temptation! It was an inspiration! Why, man, the day is ours!"

Seton had been speaking from necessity in suppressed tones, but with such vehemence that he had all the effect of shouting out his words.

But Dalton shook his head:

"No, Frank, the day is no nearer ours than it was at the roll-call of delegations. *I'm going to get that trust plank into the platform to-night.* It was no inspiration—it was a temptation—but I've conquered it. I shall sacrifice everything but the right, for the sake of harmony."

"Of course," he added grimly, as the waiter came up with their hats and to get the tip which he didn't deserve for his poor service, "if they're too much for me—if I fail—I shall still have that card to play."

CHAPTER XII.

A GOOD NIGHT'S WORK.

The night had been a long, hot one, with scarcely a breath of air stirring, and its ravages were plainly visible in the demoralized air of the Committee on Resolutions.

Around the great table under the hot glare of the electric lights, sat men in every degree of dishevelment. Coats had been universally discarded early in the evening and with many of the committee, collars and neckties had not been long in following the coats. A few who suffered most from the sultry air had loosened their shirts at the throat, and were even then gasping for breath and seeking relief in the vigorous use of palm leaves. The air was thick with tobacco smoke, and by the elbow of nearly every man there sat a beer mug or a high-ball glass. Eyes burned redly under shocks of touseled hair, and the beard on many a face was showing black or red, as the case might be, and grizzly as a week old growth. The table was piled high with papers in picturesque confusion, and the floor was littered with the torn scraps of rejected resolutions or of impotent efforts at framing one.

It had been a long, hard fight, and now that the night was waning, it was beginning to tell even on Dalton's iron frame. Not on his iron will, however. The pallor of his face, and dark circles under his eyes showed the effect of heat and fatigue, but the eyes themselves were as undaunted as ever. Step by step he had fought his

way all through that long night, steadily gaining strength for the final supreme effort. Most of the points for which he had fought, he had won. Those he had lost had been relinquished voluntarily for the sake of harmony—willing to concede a point that did not seem vital in order to bring more power to bear on the vital ones.

Jim Burton and he had faced each other all night on opposite sides of the table. They two, almost alone of that room full of men, had not resorted to the stimulus of high-ball or cock-tail to keep them awake or give them an adventitious brilliance. Each was conscious that he needed every faculty clear and undimmed to watch the other, and both were under a stronger stimulant than any artificial one could be.

But steadily as Dalton had been gaining, so steadily Jim Burton had been losing. He had learned in this committee room that the machine might control the nomination, but it would not fashion the platform. The platform was Dalton's.

Yes, and the members of the committee were Dalton's. Burton was ready to swear that Dalton owned them body and soul as he saw them, on every contested point, swing over to his side at the magic of his voice and the fire of his oratory.

But the moment had arrived when Burton was willing to yield no more. It should be a fight to the finish on Dalton's trust plank. Indeed, it was a point on which he felt he *could* not yield. It meant too much in his section of the country. Introduce that plank into the platform, and his state was lost to the party almost with-

out doubt; and his state meant the largest electoral vote in the college.

Nor did he believe Berkeley would consent to run on any such platform; and should he go back to the East with the record of having permitted such an egregious blunder, his prestige would be gone. It would be humiliating enough to plead the overwhelming influence of Dalton, but, worse than that, those of his party at home who had not been witness to Dalton's almost supernatural sway over the hearts and minds of men, would hardly believe him, and would suspect him of treachery.

It was imperative, therefore, that he should not fail, and he set himself like a grim mastiff to watch every loop-hole that might give possible ingress to the platform of the much dreaded anti-trust resolution.

For a while he thought he was going to succeed, for his agents had been diligent in their work of cajoling, bribing, threatening, and his own eloquent plea to the committee not to let the most powerful state in the Union be lost to the party, carried visible weight, with the Southerners at least. He sat down amid the ringing plaudits of a majority of the committee, flushed with triumph and the assurance of success.

But Dalton had not been on his feet two minutes before Burton's flush of triumph had given way to the sickly hue of dread. Pale with the effects of the night's work, and the pallor heightened by contrast with the heavy masses of dark hair lying damp on his forehead, Dalton spoke calmly and logically, but with repressed intensity that stirred his listeners to their souls. Only

at the very last was there a burst of that wonderful fire that marked him the orator of his day. In a voice deep with earnestness, vibrating with feeling, strong, even after the fatigues of the night, he concluded his speech:

"You are making a platform to catch contributions from the great corporations—we should make a platform to get votes from the masses of the people. Remember that we shall have other campaigns after this one! We have been fighting for the people; let us continue to fight for them!"

Jim Burton could see that the men who had applauded him to the echo were weakening, and he held himself alert, ready to spring to his feet the moment Dalton should sit down.

But he was not quick enough—a younger man, was a moment ahead of him. With evident reluctance the chairman recognized the Honorable Joseph Hall, a name that had won national and international fame in the last two years for its owner in his great fight against municipal corruption.

Very rapidly, with an incisiveness characteristic of the man, he summed up Dalton's arguments. Then he paused a moment, and turning to Jim Burton he lifted a warning finger and shook it with a vehemence that made even that seasoned veteran quail; for he saw that here was an indictment imminent, and when had the Honorable Joseph Hall's indictments ever been known to fail in securing justice.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, but still with that warning finger raised toward Jim Burton, so that he had all the effect

of addressing him alone, "Mr. Chairman, the Wise Men of the East have done a foolish thing in antagonizing Mr. Dalton's trust plank. Let them keep up their fight against it! Let them force Mr. Dalton into a corner, as they are compassing heaven and earth to do! It is what Mr. Dalton's most ardent supporters are heartily praying for. What will be the result? To-morrow Mr. Dalton will carry a minority report into the convention, and *you know what will follow!* Let him but utter on the platform of the convention the ringing words he has uttered here in behalf of his brothers of the plow and workshop, and there will be such a landslide towards his banner that the convention will forget that they had ever considered the name of Berkeley.

"Why do I get up here, if I am a friend of Dalton's, and expose the situation to you, when by letting it slide unnoticed I might secure my friend's nomination? *I am here at Dalton's request.* He has asked me—if I should think the seriousness of the danger demanded it, if failure of the resolution looked imminent, or possible—to tell you what the result of failure would be. And this in no spirit of threatening, but that you might be honorably warned. A moment ago he gave me the signal that meant, "The time has come," and I am saying to you the words that will probably defeat the dearest wish of my heart—the nomination of John Dalton for the Presidency. You ask me why Dalton is so insane as thus to defeat himself? I answer that in the opinion of some of his friends it is because he is quixote, but most of us know, that it is because he is built in that large and noble

mould that puts the right before everything, and he believes that the party should stand upon this trust plank which gives equal rights to the low and the high, the rich and the poor. And, also, proud and glad as I know he would be to bear the standard of the party he has loved all his life, there is something dearer to him than his own personal gratification—it is the harmony of that loved party. If, as his friends believe, by bringing in that minority report to-morrow he should rend the party in twain, even though by far the larger half should flock to his standard, no personal gain could make amends to him for the disunion of his party.

"Mr. Chairman,"—and once more that long forefinger was shaken almost in Jim Burton's face, and if it were possible to Jim Burton to cower he would have cowered beneath the speaker's piercing glance—"the day this convention opened, all the forces of the machine were arrayed against John Dalton. So thoroughly were they organized that they supposed they had completely and finally routed him. They believed him to be utterly discredited with the party. So well had they done their work, that on all sides fair-weather friends were hastening to disown him, and were trying to make themselves strong with the machine and obliterate any past records of tramping after his banner, by telling damning stories of him: any low, mean, small, *lying* gossip they could scoop up from the gutter, they were eager to dish out in long-handled ladles.

"When he entered the convention yesterday, so completely was the convention dominated by the machine,

and so marked were the cold and averted looks of the party leaders, that even those who were warmly and loyally his friends hardly dared to raise their voices to welcome him. It is true that he received a greater welcome than any other man who entered that hall, but it was nothing to what John Dalton has heretofore received and has a right to expect from the hearts of his comrades in the old party.

"But, Mr. Chairman—" and this time the speaker's glance left Jim Burton for a moment and swept the room triumphantly—"The party leaders may have thought they had buried John Dalton under the whole crushing weight of the machine, but from the moment he entered that hall on Wednesday he has moved steadily forward in gaining prestige, until when he entered the same hall to-day, there was such a frantic display of almost idolatrous love and admiration as the world has seldom seen.

"Who listens to any one speaking on the platform! Even the great party leaders themselves can scarcely be heard ten feet away, such is the confusion of many sounds. But the moment John Dalton is on his feet, there is an instant hush, and he can easily he heard in all parts of that vast building. I tell you, sirs, if we of the West yield the nomination to you of the East—and we are not yet at all sure that we will so yield it—it will only be because in the opinion of the party leaders an eastern man will be more sure of election. But, if we should finally yield you the nomination—and I say once more that I am not at all sure that we will—it is *all* that we will yield you. In everything else we are for Dalton.

As he thinks, we think; as he acts, we act; where he leads, we are proud to follow!"

Keen, incisive of speech, his dark eyes flashing, his figure swaying with the intensity of his emotion, the Honorable Joseph Hall had been listened to breathlessly. But the moment he ceased speaking the room was in an uproar. The discomforts of heat and fatigue had long been forgotten. Men were on their feet shouting—"Give us the trust plank!" "Give us Dalton's plank!" and one or two had taken up the rythmical cry of the galleries—"Dalton Dalton! Give us Dalton!"

Under cover of the confusion, Jim Burton conferred hastily with his henchmen, and when, a few minutes later, the chairman had succeeded in restoring order sufficiently to put the question, it was discovered that Jim Burton and his followers had withdrawn their opposition, and the resolution was passed almost unanimously. They were wise enough to say—Better a defeat in the committee-room than in the convention.

Dalton, feeling that he had indeed won a great victory—the one on which he had concentrated his energies and his desires—withdrew from the table, when the tumult of congratulations was over, and sought a seat by an open window for a moment's rest, and to collect his somewhat scattered mental forces for a renewal of the conflict. The struggle was not ended. There were yet long hours of work before him when point after point would have to be fought for doubtless, but the worst was over and he could take time to breathe.

The grey of the dawn was in the sky. The morning

star shone down into his window with a quiet radiance. From some garden or park near by, came the soft twittering of birds just stirring in their nests. The sultriness of the night had given place to the cool little breeze that always precedes the rising of the sun—and on the wings of the morning came peace, and joy, and *love* into his soul.

Yes, he recognized it with a great throb of his heart—it had come at last! The strange, sweet experience that so far his life had missed, and that he had vaguely longed for, was his in overwhelming measure. With the blare of men's voices, and the glare of electric lights, and the stale odors of tobacco and liquor only a few feet from him, he saw only the soft radiance of the star, he heard only the gentle murmur of the birds in their nests, and only the fragrance of the earth under the heavy dews of a summer night was in his nostrils. He was alone with his heart and its new sweet knowledge.

What had revealed it to him so suddenly! He would have supposed that all his thoughts were absorbed by the struggle he had just been through, and here, in a lightning flash, all that was obliterated and his whole soul filled with but one longing cry—"Margaret!"

Miles away in the western part of the city she was lying asleep, and his thoughts hovered broodingly, tenderly, and adoringly about her, in the sweet and dainty peace of her surroundings so strongly contrasted with the storm and disorder and unrest of his. His soul, made superstitious by love, attributed his victory to her. She was his morning star!

For the first time he definitely acknowledged to him-

self a determination, should victory once more perch upon his banners and bring him the nomination, to lay all his honors at her feet. And more than that, whereas up to this moment he had been hesitating about the nomination, for her sake he now fully decided to make a desperate fight to win it. And with such strength and confidence did this love inspire him, that what had seemed to him hopeless a few moments before, appeared now as easily possible.

With his whole soul pulsating and throbbing with these new desires and purposes, the din of the room behind him seemed miles away, and he started, as one from sleep, when a hand was laid on his shoulder. But in a moment he had gathered his faculties together and turned with ready hand and smile to greet the newcomer.

"Come," said the Honorable Joseph Hall, "we can't get on without you."

Dalton rose and shook himself, and turned to plunge once more into the strife that had suddenly become fraught with new purpose to him. But he stopped a moment first, to say, with such earnestness of feeling as set the other man's pulses to tingling and his eyes to glowing—for no man could lightly esteem such words from such a man—

"Joe, you saved the situation. There's another star in your crown. If we have done a good deed by getting that resolution into the platform, the glory of the victory is yours." And then he laid his arm affectionately over his shoulder and added almost solemnly:

"When the time comes, Joe, for me to lay the mantle

down, I'm glad I will have such a strong young Elisha to pick it up and wear it more worthily than I have worn it."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE EARLY DAWN.

Margaret left the convention hall not very much in the mood for a party that had been planned for the evening to entertain some out of town friends: a dinner at The Alps, where they lingered long to listen to the music and fancied themselves in Switzerland, so life-like were the mountain peaks in the moonlight; a stroll down the Pike, whose glittering palaces and gay throngs dazzled and delighted the country friends; then across the Plaza to see the cascades illuminated, and home through the park by moonlight in their motor cars.

Half past eleven found her in her room more worn out than she had often been from arduous social functions, and her head had hardly touched her pillow until the dreamless sleep of exhaustion visited her. Five hours later, she opened her eyes with a start and the feeling that some one had called her name. She listened for a while, her heart beating fast, but there was no sound of any voice and she concluded the rays from the morning star, shining in at her window, had touched her eyelids and roused her from sleep.

She had been afraid at first, alone in the dark and that strange dream cry ringing in her ears, but she saw the morning was beginning to break and the faint streaks of light in the east, momentarily growing brighter, comforted her. Soon it would be broad day and if any evil

was lurking near it would flee away at the approach of the sun.

But sleep had fled from her eyelids. Her heart was no longer beating with fear, and as calm and a sense of security returned to her with the growing light, she began to review the events of the last two days. It was almost the first moment she had had for quiet thinking, since either there had been others present to claim her attention or she had been too weary for thought. Now she tried very calmly to think over her relations to Hugh. Both Hugh's attitude and her brother's had made her feel that she had given more of a promise for the future than she had intended, and already the chains were beginning to gall her.

She was trying now to set before herself the reasons why the desire of her brother's heart and Hugh's should be hers also. She was deliberately recalling every sweet and manly characteristic in Hugh that had long ago won her warm affection, and reviewing in memory the many happy days they had spent together in other summers. Perhaps she was mistaken in expecting in herself any more stirring emotion. Perhaps she was capable of nothing stronger than this sweet and friendly regard she had always felt for Hugh. No doubt it was the very safest foundation on which to build her hopes of happiness, and no doubt, too, it was what many people called love, only she had been foolishly looking for something less placid. Very likely she was too old to feel those transports of which she had read and heard—and then, in the very midst of her philosophizing, she sighed.

With the sigh vanished every thought of Hugh, and as in a flash of light she saw a strong man, his noble head thrown back, listening with an illumined face that revealed the soul's exaltation to the thousands frantically shouting his name. She saw him standing on the platform pleading for justice and swaying men's minds at his will. She saw his pallor, and heard the vibrations of his tones that meant overwhelming disappointment as he called for the roll-call of delegations. Last of all, she saw him in her box with his winning smile, half playful, half timid, and at every new view of him her heart responded with a throb of exultation or of pity that had nothing of the placidity with which she had been reviewing her relations to Hugh.

Then she recalled that Mr. Seton had told her that without doubt Mr. Dalton would be at work all night in the Committee on Resolutions. Very likely he was at this moment working hard in the hot and close downtown section of the city, and he had been working all through the long hours that she had been sleeping. He had asked her in a spirit of half jest—Margaret had recognized that it was also half earnest—to be mascot for that anti-trust resolution. What were the duties of a mascot, she wondered—were they to lie in sleep while some one else toiled? She supposed that he only meant that he wanted her wishes for the success of the resolution. Well, he should have them, and she resolutely set herself to work to think of it, as if by some juggling process of "absent treatment" she could compel success for it.

But in the very act of concentrating her thoughts upon the resolution, she found herself dreaming of the man who was its author, and she checked herself quickly with a guilty feeling of treason to Hugh. Then she began to chafe. Why should she not be free to think of any man if she liked? Why had she bound herself so needlessly? She was happier with her freedom; and she began to long for it with a sort of desperation, as if she had already taken the irrevocable step and discovered too late that it was all a hideous mistake. She tossed upon her pillow with burning cheeks, and little, fretful sighs and moans of self pity. Then, with a sudden keen sense of relief, she remembered it was *not* too late. She sprang from her bed, threw a light silk gown around her and sat down at her desk. The morning star had paled, the east was all a glow of rose—bright color of hope—and it flooded the room and enveloped her, as she sat at her desk and wrote with feverish haste:

"DearHugh—It was all a mistake the other afternoon. We will be the same dear friends we have always been, but don't ask me that question any more. It was all because of a foolish longing I had that day to be young again. But I don't want to be young any more. I don't want to be different in any way, and I don't want you to be different. I want you to be always my dear old Hugh, and I will always be—

Your devoted friend Margaret."

She folded her note, put it in an envelope, sealed and directed it. Then she rose and went to her eastern window and stood a long while looking out at the miracle of

the birth of a new day. She was conscious of a great load lifted from her heart and a wonderful gladness rushing in to take its place: a gladness, tempered but not wholly saddened by a keen pang for Hugh's hurt when he should read her note.

She drew down the dark shades to shut out the sun flooding the world with his shining, and went slowly back to bed. Outside, in the green tree-tops, song sparrows and thrushes were singing delirious *aves* to the radiant morning; she turned her face on her pillow and with a soft sigh of content, fell into peaceful sleep and happy dreams.

CHAPTER XIV.

PEYTON MAKES A MISTAKE.

Margaret little thought when, with a policeman in front of her and Hugh and her brother on either side, she wedged her way through the raging mob trying to force an entrance to the convention hall, that before she came out of those doors, the sun, that was now low in the western sky, would have dipped below the western seas, rolled majestically over the lands on the other side of the globe, and be serenely shining in the east. Still less did she realize that the hours lying just before her were big with the fate of a party, big with the fate of a man who had been persistently in her thoughts all day, big, perhaps, with her own fate.

No man could have taken a mortal hurt better than Hugh had taken his. Margaret's note had been sent across to his sister's house, where she knew he was staying, and he received it as he was going out after breakfast. Recognizing the writing, he had gone back into the house to open it, stepping into a little reception-room at the side for better light. He could hardly have found a more retired spot in which to meet and wrestle with a great sorrow, for, since it was used only for receiving formal callers, it was the room least likely to be entered by any member of the household. He had not been entirely unprepared for it. Something in Margaret's manner, since her return to the city, had aroused in him

vague fears; but the blow was no less crushing that it was not wholly unexpected. For the first time in these ten years he felt that the answer was final; and the hope that had by turns, through all these long years, flickered and flamed, must now be extinguished forever.

For a long time he sat there fighting desperately to save some remnant of his happiness. Then, feeling that he must get away where no one who knew him could see him, he called up to his sister that he had decided to ride out to Kentwick, and going out to the stables he saddled Selim himself. It had been for a ride in the park with Margaret that afternoon that he had ordered Selim brought to the city the day before, but there was no remembrance of his engagement in his mind as he threw the saddle over Selim's back and tightened straps and buckles with feverish haste. Selim, knowing he was on the homeward way, flew over the familiar road, and the faster he went the more Hugh urged him, as if by swifter motion he could flee from the sorrow that but sat the more securely at his back, sardonically grinning at his futile efforts.

All the morning Hugh wandered over the plantation from one familiar spot to another, restlessly seeking some help for his hurt, and resolutely turning his face from the wooded crests opposite where the chimneys of Beauvoir showed among the trees. But let a normal man be suffering what he may, a chop and a mug of ale will put him in better heart to bear his woes, and so it happened that after luncheon Hugh took courage to look over to the chimneys of Beauvoir, and, in looking, began to long

for the consoling presence of the dear old lady within its walls. Tia Elisa had been his comforter in many a childish woe, and his heart, making a despairing outcry for sympathy, knew nowhere else to turn. Not that he had any intention of confiding his troubles to her—they were not of a nature to bear utterance, nor was he the man to weakly tell them—but just to sit beside her a little while would, he believed, transfer some of the peace of her quiet spirit to his troubled one.

Tia Elisa knew, the moment she saw her favorite, that something had gone wrong with him, and she divined it had to do with Margaret. But it was not for her to question, and she set to work with all the gentle wiles of which she was past mistress, to beguile him from his troubles. And so soothing was her gentle ripple of country-side gossip, and her soft gurgles of laughter over some of Cæsar's and Gaston's extraordinary doings, that he gave quite a different answer from any he would have supposed possible an hour earlier, to her suddenly propounded question:

"Are you going in town to the convention this evening?"

"I hardly know," Hugh hesitated, "Perhaps—Can I do anything for you?"

"Only, if you go and it won't bother you, I would like to send Margaret a bunch of zinnias and marigolds for her breakfast table. My dear girl loves the old-fashioned garden flowers almost as much as her old aunty does."

"I had not intended going," said Hugh slowly, "But I am not sure but I have changed my mind since coming

over here. Will you let me call Margaret up? And if she would like to have me go with her, I will."

He called up Margaret and asked her his question, and she answered—

"Very much—and come to a half past five o'clock dinner, Hugh. Every one says we must be at the doors early or we'll not get in."

Five minutes before the hour he presented himself at the house in Devonshire Place, bearing in his hands the great bunch of gay garden flowers which he had bravely carried through the streets from the car. The maid at the door relieved him of the flowers and ushered him into the cool library where he awaited Margaret, standing with his back to the western window, his hands in his pockets, rigidly erect in a tense effort to keep himself under control.

Margaret came in a moment later, and as she hesitated an imperceptible instant on the threshold, and the golden haze of the afternoon sun, softened by filtering through lace at the windows, enveloped her, bringing out into high relief all the lovely curves of cheek and throat, and the gold of her hair and the sapphire of her eyes, she had never looked quite so beautiful to Hugh's sorrowful gaze. It was only a moment she hesitated, and then she came quickly forward, both hands outstretched, and her eyes lifted to Hugh's with an appeal for forgiveness that was more than the poor fellow could stand.

"It's all right, Margaret, it's all right," he said hastily, as he grasped her hands. But his grip on them was strong and nervous and the voice with which he spoke

was not quite steady, and the quick tears sprang to Margaret's eyes at these signs of the hurt she had given him.

"Oh, say, now, Margaret, I'm not worth it, you know, I'm not worth it!" he muttered gripping her hands still harder, until she winced with the physical pain. And then, Peyton entering the room at that moment, Hugh dropped her hands and greeted him with such loud joviality as quite non-plussed Peyton, who had heretofore thought of Hugh as rather a quiet fellow.

To Margaret, the joviality sounded so forced she thought Peyton must recognize it and understand. But Peyton only feared he had surprised some tender meeting, and, the wish being father to the thought, concluded the matter was all settled between Margaret and Hugh, and beamed on them both with paternal tenderness and approbation, while he shook Hugh's hand so cordially as to have all the effect—Margaret thought, and winced to the thought—of offering congratulations.

And this was how it happened that, in spite of Margaret's note to him, Hugh was in his old place by her side, helping Peyton to force a passage through the mob for her, while the sun, shining at her back, was preparing for his dip into the western seas and his rapid swim around the other hemisphere to be ready, calmly shining in the eastern skies to greet her when, the eventful night over, she should step out from the convention hall dazed by the morning light, but far more dazed by the swift march of destiny.

CHAPTER XV.

A PROMISE WITH A CONDITION.

They had been sitting many hours in a stifling atmosphere. The night was far along, but there was no weariness in the faces of any of the thousands closely packed into the vast hall.

It was the first night session of the convention, and the glare of the electric lights added to the sensation of heat. More than that, it was the session that would, without doubt, determine the candidate for the presidency, and the mob that had filled the streets outside for blocks around the great building, had forced its way inside, tickets or no tickets, until there seemed literally no space for another human being.

Dalton had come up to their box soon after the opening of the convention, while the chairman of the Resolutions Committee was reading the platform in a voice that could not be heard beyond the first few rows of delegates. Dalton had soon perceived that there was no possibility of Margaret's getting even the least idea of the platform from the reading, and he wanted her to know about it.

He was looking very worn, for it had been noon before the session of the Resolutions Committee was over, and his followers, soon getting wind of his victory in the committee-room, had gathered about him at once with renewed hope and eager for a more aggressive campaign.

Dalton himself was ready for it; partly because his

confidence in his own powers, which had been terribly shaken by his defeat in his minority report for the contesting delegates, was now fully restored by his victory over the machine in the platform, and he was even more ready for it because of that sudden revelation that had come to him in the early dawn in the crowded committee-room. As a result, the afternoon had been spent in conferences with his friends, laying plans for the work of the night, and he had found no moment in which to snatch the long-deferred and much-needed sleep.

But if he was looking worn and white, there was an air of joyful exhilaration about him that Margaret had not heretofore noticed, and it added something bright and strongly winning to the already powerful magnetism of his personality. Every one in the box, with the possible exception of Peyton, came under its influence at once; and whereas they had been cordial before, their cordiality was now intensified to a warm friendliness. They were all there—the usual party of six; Julie and Mrs. Paxton having been escorted into the hall one at a time by Hugh and Peyton as Margaret had been; and Seton having joined them just before the chairman's gavel fell to announce the convention opened.

Frank had not delayed to tell them of the great victory in the committee, and so Dalton was for a moment quite overwhelmed with enthusiastic congratulations as he entered the box. Hugh occupied a seat beside Margaret, but there was a vacant space on the other side of her and a vacant chair in another part of the box, and while the three men had instantly sprung to their

feet and offered Dalton their seats on entering, he declined them all and brought the vacant chair to the place he had at once descried as the one he most desired.

No one in the audience being able to hear the reading, the house had naturally fallen into a murmur of talk which, though individually and separately quiet enough, became collectively a subdued roar. A very delightful roar indeed, Dalton regarded it, since it set off Margaret and himself as much to themselves as if they had been alone in the vast hall.

"I've come up to tell you about the platform, since you can't hear it," he said, as he took his seat beside her. "It's *our* platform, you know—yours and mine."

The radiant confidence of the man and his manner of taking possession of her—which though sufficiently unobtrusive as to call for no comment from others, was also perfectly palpable to herself, made Margaret feel that some subtle change had taken place in their relations. It had been little more than twenty-four hours since she had seen him, but in those hours of absence she was conscious that their friendship—for so she boldly called it—had, in some unexplained way, made great strides. For his radiant confidence, his air of possession, so far from offending her, met with a quick response in her exquisite smile of pleasure and comprehension.

"Is it ours?" she murmured. "You are very good to me to give me a share in it. But tell me about it, please."

And so under cover of the subdued roar of voices, he told her all about his conflict of the night before; espe-

cially his struggles with Jim Burton and his signal victory. And what is more, he enjoyed the telling of it as he had seldom enjoyed anything in his life. He was not the man to boast of his own triumphs, nor even to talk over his own achievements and his own experiences. Opinions, views, plans for the future, he was always ready to discuss, but what he had accomplished in the past he had heretofore left for others to tell. Now, to his own amazement if he had stopped to think of it, he was pouring out his soul to a woman he had known scarcely more than four days, and gleefully boasting of his triumphs to her without a twinge of false shame. And, moreover, she was receiving his confidences exactly as he bestowed them—freely, openly, with delightful sympathy and cordiality as if they belonged to her by right; and with no reserve of critical wonder as to why he should be telling them to her.

But Dalton, while he had been deeply engrossed with Margaret—his whole five senses deliciously submerged in the intoxicating atmosphere that enveloped her—had yet, with his sixth sense been conscious of the lapse of time, and while he could not hear even so much as a sound of the reader's voice, he knew that he must be near the end of his reading. It behooved him to be in his seat when the end should come, for who could tell what discussion of the most vital points in the platform might not be suddenly sprung upon them.

He explained this to Margaret as he rose to go.

"But you will let me come back, will you not?" he asked, "when I find I can safely leave my post?"

"Just as often as you like," answered Margaret. And his eyes looking down into hers caught there some shy and sweet confession of her pleasure in his visits that set his whole soul aflame. It was with difficulty that he made his exit from the box properly, in such tumult of new emotions did he find himself; and it was well, perhaps, for the fate of his resolutions, that they were accepted without discussion and the platform unanimously adopted as a whole—convincing proof of the dread the committee felt of permitting Dalton to use his silver tongue in the convention as he had used it in the committee-room.

Not until the first state in the alphabetical list of states had yielded its place to the "Empire State of New York," and there had mounted the platform the young New Yorker who was to make the speech that would put Berkeley into nomination, did Dalton at last get himself well under control. Then he sternly put aside all softer thoughts and set himself to follow with keenest and most critical attention the speaker of the moment. It was one of the few speeches he thought would carry weight, and, therefore, one most to be feared in this new fight he was making for the nomination. The man who was to make the speech was a new man to Dalton. He had never heard him, but he had heard much of him, as a young man of unusual brilliance and logical acumen, and his opening sentences convinced Dalton that he had not been over-rated. In a moment his keen mind was on the alert, and with the closing words of the speech: "New York nominates for the Presidency, Martin R.

Berkeley," there was no longer a thought in Dalton's mind of any woman on earth. The image of Margaret was as utterly effaced as if for him she had never existed.

Berkeley's name was hardly out of the mouth of the speaker, when as one man—looking, Frank Seton said to Margaret in the box, suspiciously like machine work—every Berkeley delegate was standing on the seat of his chair frantically waving flags and hats and banners.

The tumult that followed was like the tumult of the day before when Dalton had made his entry into the convention, and John sat listening to it, white to his lips, and for the second time fully realizing the overwhelming power of the machine. As the uproar kept on with no signs of abatement, Dalton left his seat, and at his glance a half dozen others from as many different states followed him to a corner of the lobby where they might hold a hasty conference.

The plan of action had been thoroughly outlined in the afternoon, but there was some slight change that it seemed to Dalton well to make. It had been decided that the Honorable Joseph Hall should make the nominating speech in which Dalton's name should be presented to the convention, and Dalton's own state, following immediately after Hall's in regular order, should second the nomination. Dalton could not of course, second his own nomination, and he would, for the time, relinquish his place as leader to another member of the delegation who should make the seconding speech. But his friends insisted, and John himself believed, that Dalton's words would carry more weight than any other man's, and so

it was arranged that after the speech of seconding, Dalton himself should be called for and should make a speech—not advocating his own claims, but showing why Berkeley would not be the choice of the people, and setting clearly before the convention also, those principles which he represented and to which Berkeley and the machine were unalterably opposed. There was no doubt about the possibility of his being permitted to make his speech, for they well knew, let but one or two men call for Dalton and in a moment the whole house would be in such an uproar of demands for him that the chairman would be compelled to grant him a hearing.

All this had been arranged before, but the change Dalton wished to make, was to suggest to a state, the last in the alphabetical list and friendly to him, but who must put in nomination a "Favorite Son," that when Dalton's state should be called, Dalton should himself rise and yield his place to them, thus securing for himself the last hearing immediately preceding the voting. The wisdom of this arrangement was evident, since this would give Dalton chance for a final and powerful plea with no one to follow who could undo the influence of his words; and the friendly state, having no hope at all for her own candidate, whom she merely desired to compliment, and anxious to help on Dalton's cause in every way, willingly consented to the plan.

It had taken some ten or fifteen minutes to accomplish this, but as the half dozen men returned to the convention hall the uproar was still at its height, and Dalton, having done all that could for the moment be done to

further his cause, felt himself once more at liberty to seek Margaret in her box.

But if the image of Margaret had for the time been obscured in Dalton's mind by the stern exegencies of the occasion, the image of Dalton in Margaret's mind had been every moment growing more insistent and vivid. She had seen the flame leap into his eyes as he returned her glance, and a spark from it had set her own emotions into a conflagration, not so fierce, perhaps, as Dalton's, but very disturbing to her equable soul. There had been with her no compelling need to quench the conflagration and every incident that followed but added fuel to the flames. His broad shoulders and leonine head were in direct line between her and the platform, and so, while apparently giving strict attention to the speaker, no turn of his head, not the slightest gesture, escaped her.

She felt that she could interpret them all, too; that a key had been given her that made his soul transparent to her, and translating his slightest movement was like reading from an open book. She thought she could tell the moment when his dreaming musings gave place to stern attention—and no doubt John dismissed them with the quick shake of his head that was a habitual gesture with him and that Margaret might easily have understood. The uproar that broke forth at the mention of Berkeley's name at the close of the nominating speech, dismayed her. She had thought such demonstrations were for Dalton only, and that another could call them forth unsettled the proud conviction she had been cherishing, that be the result of the nominations what it

would, Dalton alone held the hearts of the people. Nor did it reassure her much, that Mr. Seton insisted it was all machine work, and most of the shouting was done by rooters hired for the occasion.

"Look, Miss Delauney," he had said, "I hear you wanted to know what a rooter is. There is one just behind you; no one could mistake him."

Margaret and Julie both looked back at a man standing on his chair a few rows behind them, and who, with distorted face and mechanical gestures, was in stentorian tones uttering at regular intervals his cry of "Berkeley! Berkeley!"

"Ugh!" Julie shuddered, "They're dreadful creatures, aren't they? They look like that awful man in Verestchagin's picture of Christ before Pilate."

"That one does, certainly," answered Seton, "But there are a lot of them so respectable looking that you couldn't tell them from the real stuff."

But even the hideous man did not comfort Margaret much. No doubt some of it was rooter-work, but the acclamations were too universal not to be genuine. Indeed, their own box was almost the only one in the wide circle of boxes, many of them filled with people she knew, that was not frantically shouting itself hoarse.

She had thought she could tell from the rigid set of John's shoulders, just the emotions he was experiencing at this ovation to Berkeley; and she was not surprised, when he rose from his seat and turned towards her as he started down the aisle for the lobby, to see that his face was white and stern and set.

When she saw on his return from the lobby that he was coming towards her box, she found herself in such a state of perturbation as was heretofore foreign to her experience. It seemed to her that the glance exchanged between them as he left her had been almost an open avowal on his part and an acceptance of it on hers, and it would not be possible again to meet him on the simple and frank terms of friendship. Involuntarily she turned to Hugh for refuge and plunged precipitately into an excited and disjointed discussion with him of rooters, the last speaker, Berkeley—anything that came into her mind at which she could clutch.

Dalton's interval of strict attention to business had given him a firmer grasp of himself, and while the mere act of turning towards Margaret's box brought back an overwhelming flood of emotions that had been for a little while relegated to the background, he was still able to control them and to make his entrance into the box as easy and natural as usual. His quick glance took in the signs of Margaret's excitement—her heightened color, her voice pitched at an unusual key, and the feverish hurry of her sentences—and he did not for a few moments bestow on her more of his attention than the general bow and smile with which he greeted the box. Instead, he entered at once into a lively discussion with Peyton of some of the points of the speech they had just been listening to. It was with the speaker's criticism of the administration that Peyton took special issue, naturally, since the administration was of Peyton's party. Naturally, also, since Dalton was not of the administration

party, he thought the points well taken.

"Well," said Peyton finally, and with the air of saying the last word, "I hope, Mr. Dalton, if you have a speech to make you will let the administration alone—the President anyway—it strikes me as in very poor taste, to say the least."

"I don't think you will have any quarrel with me on that score, Mr. Le Beau," returned John smilingly. "If I get a chance to make a speech I will have too much to find fault with nearer home; I am a sort of Ishmael in my own party, you know."

"An Ishmael!" exclaimed Julie, hands and shoulders indicating child-like dismay, "I thought it was an *Idol!* Isn't that what you've been telling me, Mr. Seton?" And her appealing glance at Frank was quite irresistible to that soft-hearted woman-hater.

"Oh, you mustn't mind anything Mr. Seton says," said John laughing, "He's not responsible. No court would take his oath on the witness stand where I'm concerned; he's a prejudiced party."

"Well, I certainly call *that* idolatry," said Julie, with another fetching glance at Seton, and in the laugh that followed, Margaret and Hugh both joined. For Margaret, as John intended, had had time to grow calm again, and for the last few minutes she and Hugh had both been attentive listeners to the discussion between Peyton and Dalton.

For some time the uproar had been abating, and now quiet was so far restored that the chairman's gavel called the house to order, and Dalton dropped into his old seat

on the other side of Margaret, quite as a matter of course, Peyton jealously noted.

"I've come for a long stay," he said, smiling down on Margaret with such frank friendliness as put her at once at her ease. "There will be nothing of importance on for a long time: nothing but states putting favorite sons into nomination—a tedious process, but necessary I suppose. And in the meanwhile, I may as well be up here as down there, where it is very much hotter."

"Not a particularly complimentary reason for seeking our society, do you think, Hugh?" said Margaret, who nervously desired to include Hugh in the conversation.

"Not very complimentary, perhaps," answered Hugh, "but an extremely good reason I should think; for if it is any hotter down there than it is here I don't see how you have lived through it, Mr. Dalton."

Indeed the heat as the night advanced, had been growing insufferable. Very few men in the vast audience were wearing coats, not one waistcoats, and many had discarded neckties and collars. The women, of course, had the advantage in their filmy dresses and were looking cool and placid in comparison with the suffering men.

Dalton, whether Margaret had been the occasion or not, had made such radical changes in his dress as had taken off ten years in his looks. A short coat of silk, had taken the place of the hot frock; a careless four-in-hand, light in color and texture, had replaced the stiff black tie, and a soft white negligee shirt, exquisite for fineness and workmanship and belted at the waist had taken the place of the stiff shirt front and black waist-

coat. The male bird puts on his brightest plumage in the spring, and the man of our species is no less wise when he sets out to woo. Dalton had also the happy faculty of looking cool, no matter how he might be feeling, and Margaret was grateful to him for it, since poor Hugh, constantly mopping his flushed face, had kept her in a very uncomfortable state of sympathy.

It was as Dalton said, there was a long succession of nominating speeches, some of them bright and holding the interest well, but many of them inaudible at the distance of their box. None of them were a hindrance to conversation, and while they listened sometimes, when they could hear, the two hours that Dalton sat in the box were spent in an almost uninterrupted conversation. Most of it was general, but there were many opportunities for Dalton to say things intended for Margaret's ears alone, and he was not the man to miss his opportunities. In that two hours their acquaintance with each other made such strides as it might not have made in months of ordinary intercourse. There is no such sense of seclusion and intimacy as the presence of a great throng gives, and Margaret and Dalton were both exquisitely alive to it.

There had been scarcely one of the speakers who had not managed, in some way, to bring in laudations of Dalton, since in this way, even those who were fully determined to vote for Berkeley, wished to gracefully acknowledge the debt the party owed its great leader; and at every mention of his name, the galleries had broken into wild applause and insistent calls for him. The

audience was not long in discovering where he was sitting, and naturally, on each occasion of the kind, they turned to look at him sitting beside Margaret in the box. At first it had been a trying ordeal for her, feeling the attention of the whole house directed to her box, and, possibly, some of it curiously to her. But Dalton did not seem to think of it in the light of an annoyance, since he had himself grown so accustomed to it, and he responded only with his luminous smile. But after several out-breaks it did occur to him that what only gave him pleasure as a token of the popular feeling, might give annoyance to Miss Le Beau; and as the applause died down and attention was once more directed to the speaker, he turned to Margaret.

"Do you mind my being here? Does it make you feel uncomfortably conspicuous?" he asked in a low tone.

Margaret hesitated the fraction of a second, then she answered softly:

"No, I believe it makes me feel very proud."

Dalton gave her a quick, grateful glance, but with it there was something much warmer than gratitude, and the swift color in Margaret's cheek answered his glance.

"Do you remember, Miss Le Beau," said Dalton in the same low tone, "the afternoon I met you at Mrs. Paxton's tea?"

"It is not so long ago that I should have forgotten," answered Margaret smilingly, "It was only last Monday."

"Last Monday!" exclaimed Dalton, "I thought it was months ago. If we were to measure time by thoughts and emotions," he added earnestly, "it was years ago."

Margaret did not answer. She was painfully conscious of the thousands of eyes about her, any pair of which might at any moment fall upon her face, and she was striving to look indifferent and as if they two were engaged in an ordinary discussion.

"But I did not mean to ask," Dalton went on, "if you remembered meeting me; but do you remember the queer speech I made you at saying good-bye?"

Margaret remembered it perfectly. It had been persistent in returning to her at all kinds of inopportune moments, but she only replied:

"Was it queer? And what was it? Say it again, please."

Dalton felt the slightest shade of disappointment that she had not remembered, but he knew he had no right to expect that he should have made upon her the same vivid impression she had made upon him at their first meeting; and so he repeated it:

"I told you, you had given me pleasure in two ways that afternoon, and I promised to tell you the second way when I should know you better. Do you think I know you well enough now?"

"How can I tell?" Margaret was greatly curious to know what it could be, but something in his manner frightened her, and she would not urge the telling. Perhaps she showed her fright a little.

"Well, I am not going to tell you just now." Dalton smiled reassuringly in his paternal fashion that was always particularly winning to Margaret. "But I want to tell you something else. There is a possibility, not

much of one, but a fighting chance, of my getting the nomination. If I win it, then I will tell you the second way."

"But if you shouldn't win? Am I never to know?" Margaret's eyes looked her dismay.

Dalton grew suddenly grave and there was a moment of silence before he spoke. Then he said, in a voice tense with repressed feeling:

"No, Miss Le Beau, if I lose the nomination you will never know."

And Margaret, wondering greatly what it could have been that gave him pleasure that afternoon of their first meeting, and that moved him so deeply in the remembrance, had no words with which to answer him.

CHAPTER XVI.

FLIGHT FROM DEFEAT.

That was the last visit Dalton made the Le Beau box during the long night.

It was already advancing into the wee sma' hours, and the slow length of nominating speeches, varied by demonstrations gotten up to compliment some favorite, had been dragging along interminably. Now, suddenly, events began to move. There were signs of an approaching crisis, and John, who in all his absorption with Margaret, had still kept his finger on the pulse of the convention found it was time for him to be at his post. He had said, on leaving the box, that he hoped to be able to come back but he could not be sure.

"It may be a tremendous struggle from now on to the end," he said, "Until within the last few hours, I had not thought of making much of an effort for the nomination, but now I am determined to make the fight of my life—and you must help me."

He said the last words with that smile that seemed to claim a right to her help, and Margaret answered it with a smile that did not deny the right.

Dalton had hardly taken his seat in his delegation, before Hall's state was called. It was very well known that his state was for Dalton, first, last and always, and Hall himself was recognized as one of his most ardent admirers and staunchest supporters. Moreover, Hall's own personality was of unusual interest. His brilliant career

of the last two years was universally known, but many of the delegates had never seen him, and curiosity to see Hall combined with the desire to hear the words that would put Dalton into nomination to secure for him an unusually attentive hearing.

When the storm of applause that had accompanied him in his progress to the platform—and that was for himself and not for his candidate—had died away, Mr. Hall waited for a moment. Without doubt he knew how to produce an effect, for the hush of expectancy added greatly to the power of his words that rang through the hall like a clarion call—"I am going to name the next President!"

He had to wait again until another storm of applause had died down before he could go on. Then, briefly, in flashing sentences, he pictured vividly "The Lion of the Party," "The man who alone in American politics stood for a great principle," "The faithful friend of the masses," "The idolized leader of the people."

At each new term, the galleries shouted back their adoration of the man whose description they easily recognized, and at each great shout, Margaret glowed afresh with a pride that had in it something of the pride of possession.

Once more the speaker came to a full stop, while the audience waited, breathlessly, for his concluding sentence:

"Mr. Chairman, and Delegates of the Convention, I present to you the name of your next President—the Honorable John Dalton!"

All the demonstrations of the night put together could hardly equal the one that followed those electric words. Dalton's followers had been busy during the speech in quietly distributing flags through the galleries, the floor, and the boxes, and with the roar that greeted Dalton's name, the vast hall sprang into a waving mass of color. Even those delegates and politicians who were Berkeley men—with the exception perhaps of a few leaders and bosses—thinking, no doubt, that like some other demonstrations, this was intended as a compliment to the man who was unquestionably the party's greatest leader, did not hesitate to wave their flags and frantically shout his name.

That did not much disturb the bosses. Knowing that the machine was perfectly organized, they did not grudge the people's champion, whose destruction they had determined upon, these last obsequies. But when Dalton's delegation raised the state standard with those states following who were loyal to him, and took up their march around the hall, and when, as they marched, state after state, from the ranks of those they had depended upon for Berkeley, caught the infection of enthusiasm and joined the march, the leaders began to tremble. With stealthy pencils they made rapid calculations, and to their dismay they began to see the majority they had counted upon, endangered.

Dalton, in his seat, was also making calculations, but he needed no pencil. A master of detail, his mind held accurately the number belonging to each delegation, and it was an easy matter to make a swift mental addition

of his rapidly growing forces. Hope was rising on steady wing, and as the triumphal procession passed Margaret's box and he had good excuse for turning to watch its progress, and saw that she was looking toward him, he could not resist one lightning-like glance of triumphant joy, straight into her eyes.

But the victory was not won. To restore order the chairman—when the demonstration had continued so long, each moment growing wilder, as to make him hopeless of its ever coming to an end—gave a signal to the orchestra, and the inspiring strains of the Star Spangled Banner crashed rythmically into the maelstrom of voices. The few who were not already on their feet, sprang to them instantly, out of respect to the nation's anthem, and those who could not join in singing the words—which was by far the greater number, since Americans do not know their national songs—kept time to the music with the waving of their flags.

It had the desired effect: it restored order. To the martial strains the procession of states marched back to their places, and by the time the stately music was ended and the band had burst into the rollicking strains of "Dixie,"—for the moment, as always, throwing the house into a delirium of enthusiasm, but one from which it quickly recovered—the convention was once more ready for business.

Then followed for three long hours a mortal struggle. While nominating or seconding speeches proceeded steadily, each side was desperately at work. Each speaker was instructed, either by Dalton's party or the

machine, to introduce into his speech, no matter who his candidate might be, some subtly convincing words for either Berkeley or Dalton. The party whips were working feverishly, visiting every doubtful delegate, and using all the powerful instruments of the machine to recover the ground they had lost; while Dalton's friends were working no less earnestly to make capital for their candidate.

Seton, too restless in this critical state of affairs to sit idly in the box, though he had no access to the delegates in their seats, had stationed himself in the entrance to the lobby where he might catch any stray delegates in coming or going and get in what work he could; or, at least, be on hand if a sudden crisis should arise where an outside man could be useful.

Dalton sat quietly in his seat, but to him came constantly the heads of his party to talk it over with him, to tell him how matters were progressing, and to get new suggestions from his fertile brain. His own state had been called immediately after business had been resumed, and he had risen and, as had been agreed upon, yielded his place to the last state on the alphabetical list. It was a move that the party bosses understood perfectly, and they almost literally gnashed their teeth with rage at his getting ahead of them in this, while they set themselves, with an energy to which new venom had been added, to get in their deadly work.

Day had long since broken, and the morning sun was streaming in the eastern windows when, last in the long list, Dalton's own state was once more called. The

great audience had not perceptibly diminished in numbers, nor perceptibly wearied in waiting. With unflagging zeal the galleries shouted at every mention of a favorite's name, and with untiring patience, men who had stood all night long in close and stifling ranks, listened and responded to each speaker's stirring words.

With the dawn a breeze had sprung up that found its way into the building, gratefully reviving fainting flesh and failing spirit. Up in Margaret's box these last hours had moved in a varying ratio of speed to the various members of the party. Margaret was too keenly alive to the impending crisis to feel anything but such intense excitement as winged each passing moment. Julie had found it extremely dull since Seton had deserted her, and if it had not been that he came back at long intervals for a moment's stay to report progress, she would have insisted on being taken home by some one, and probably have broken up the party. Hugh was honestly interested in the progress of events, and, besides, finding a mournful pleasure in Margaret's proximity through the long hours; and Helen and Peyton, when their interest in the convention doings flagged, found each other sufficiently entertaining to make the moments fleet by unnoticed.

The strain of these last hours had begun to tell on Dalton. His wonderful physique had seemed to endure without effort the physical strain of successive days and nights without sleep, and the mental strain of his gigantic mental efforts, but it was the moral strain that was beginning to tell. A man who, thus far through his career,

had never set himself seriously to accomplish an end without succeeding, now found himself engaged in a hand to hand struggle for what had suddenly become the most ardent desire of his life, and with the odds heavily against him.

His plan worked as he had intended it. The member of his delegation to whom he had entrusted the office of seconding his nomination, had hardly concluded his speech, when from all over the house came cries for Dalton. The galleries took it up, as was expected, and much as the chairman might wish to expedite matters and get down to the business of voting, there was no withstanding those importunate demands. For some time speakers had been limited to ten minute speeches, and for the last hour to five minutes, but as the chairman called Dalton to the platform he removed the time limit. It was the courtesy due a great man, and the galleries shouted their approval.

It was a dramatic moment. The house, that through the long hours of the night had with difficulty been kept by the police sergeants in any semblance of order, was now almost painfully silent; and every delegate was listening with respectful or eager attention. They had been whipped into line again; the party lash had been used vigorously and with effect, and those delegations that had for the moment been carried away by their old enthusiasm for Dalton, were ready now to do their duty by the machine and vote for Berkeley—since the machine decreed that an eastern man and one with saner views than Dalton, was the only hope of the party in the

coming election. But many of them were going to do it reluctantly, and were listening now with sorrowful attention to his words, as to the last words of the man they loved before his political death.

Dalton could not know how successful the organization had been; but some quality in the attention of the delegates gave to a mind, supersensitive to atmospheres, a vague sense of chill, against which, for the opening moments of his speech, he had to struggle. But it was a supreme effort, and it was not long until both speaker and hearers were swept from their feet by the resistless tide of his eloquence and the force of his logic. So wrapt was the audience that even the involuntary bursts of applause—as some keen thrust pierced the armor of his foes, or some noble sentiment swept men's thoughts to the skies—were quickly stilled, lest a word be lost.

He went back to his seat in the midst of another great ovation—the third that had been accorded him in that convention—and the chairman was in despair. For, should this equal the others in length, as it threatened to do, it meant a delay that could be illy borne at this late hour. Much as Dalton appreciated the enthusiasm of his friends, the delay was almost as intolerable to him as to the chairman. As a last expedient he rose to his feet once more, and in a swift and graceful gesture, expressed at the same moment his thanks and begged for quiet. It was effectual, and in a few minutes the house was in order for the voting.

Dalton sat down to await the results with what calmness he could. As the roll-call of states went on, for a

time the event seemed to hang in balance, so nearly matched were the two opponents. But gradually, Dalton began to perceive that some of the states he had counted on, some that had followed his banner around the convention hall, were pulling away from him. Many of them could not refrain from a half apology to Dalton as they announced their vote. Occasionally, a leader of a delegation made a plea of the unit rule—stating that his delegation was nearly equally divided, but that, owing to the rule, they must cast their vote solidly for Berkeley—and each leader no doubt hoped that Dalton might regard him as one of the minority.

It began to be clear to Dalton that the organization had gotten in its deadly work, and as each successive state sent its full quota of votes for Berkeley, his heart failed him, and his indomitable courage at last giving way, he began to realize that he was physically ill from overstrain and fatigue. An occasional state still came up loyally to his support, and at each such occasion the galleries went wild in their effort to show their approbation, but Dalton and his friends soon saw that their cause was hopeless.

He was growing more seriously ill, and was in danger now, at any moment, of a physical collapse. Those who sat near him saw it and urged him to go to his hotel. He could not endure the thought of running away, however, and he believed that his iron will would keep him up to the last. But there came a moment when the sense of physical weakness and faintness began to inspire him with a new dread. To physically collapse upon the floor

of the convention, it seemed to him, would be a melodramatic close to his career that he could not endure. Better the ignominy of running away than such a fiasco. While he had yet strength left to get himself out of the hall, he would go, rather than be carried out by others. By the time he had come to this conclusion the roll-call of states had so far progressed that Berkeley's nomination was assured. He was sorry he had not gone earlier, since his departure now would have the air of sulkiness added to cowardice. It must be done, however, before it was too late, and with an effort he rose to his feet, and with a careless wave of his hand to his friends and a smile on his face, started for the door.

Then he glanced at Margaret. After all, the keenest edge of his disappointment in the result had come to be that it was cutting him off forever from that hope for his future centering in her, which, in his thoughts, he had made to hinge upon the nomination.

Margaret, watching him from her box, and wondering and disappointed for a moment, that the dauntless should flee in the face of defeat, caught his glance and understood it. Startled and dismayed, she read in it a farewell as sorrowful and as final as if he had uttered the words.

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY.

Berkeley was nominated. There was not the smallest doubt of it; and long before the result was announced, many states that had cast their first ballot for some favorite son came rushing to their feet, asking a reconsideration and adding their quota of votes to swell his triumph. Dalton's states were loyal to him, frantically loyal, but most of the others who had not voted for Berkeley at first, tumbled over each other in their eagerness to get into the procession.

The party leaders were radiant. The machine had triumphed. Organization had accomplished its work, and of course the fickle crowd shouted itself hoarse. They had wanted Dalton, but since that could not be, then they were glad at least to have a candidate, and glad the long strain of the night was over. The band played "Hail to the Chief," the people roared, there was noise and confusion enough to satisfy even the Berkeley bosses.

But behind all this excitement a new excitement was making itself felt. The galleries and boxes were beginning to empty themselves; indeed, already many had left the house, eagerly seeking home and breakfast, when the strange actions of the delegates stayed the steps of those who had not yet gone. They were gathered in excited groups, there was much violent gesticulation, and as the audience began to grow quiet in its curiosity to

know what it all meant, loud talking and emphatic language could be heard. In a sudden lull, the stentorian tones of an excited Southerner came distinctly to Margaret's ears.

"Blast him!" he shouted, "Let him get off the platform if he don't like it! It's *our* platform. We made it, and if he don't like it let him get off and we'll put Dalton on."

Others heard it besides Margaret, and the strenuous efforts of the party leaders to quiet the excited delegate were plainly evident. The hall was half emptied when the excitement became apparent, and even some of the delegates had gone, supposing, although they had not been formally dismissed, that the business of the session was over. The news of what was going on in the hall quickly reached the outside in that mysterious way news has of propagating itself without visible instrument, and the delegates came running back and the hall began to fill up again. Whatever the cause for excitement, it was something that the party leaders seemed to have previous knowledge of and to have arranged for, and their effort appeared now to be to get the delegates sufficiently quieted down to make some announcement.

But feeling was running too high to submit to ordinary methods of soothing, and it was only after nearly a half hour of hard work on the part of the bosses, evidently using every cogent argument, pleading and threatening, that they had finally induced the most violent of the agitators to sulkily take their seats.

Up in the boxes, and in Margaret's box no less than in the others, the curiosity to understand what was going

on was intense. Margaret's party missed Seton, who would have been sure to bring them the coveted information had he been anywhere in the hall, and they knew, without doubt, he must have gone away with Dalton.

It was more than curiosity that moved Margaret so strongly. Dalton's defeat had affected her scarcely less deeply than it had affected him. Hugh's disappointment had been great, too, and he had heartily expressed it in such vigorous terms as had greatly comforted Margaret. Helen and Julie also were frank and voluble in their expressions of regret; only Peyton maintained a discreet and unsympathetic silence. But genuine as the disappointment of the others might be, no one of them suffered from it as did Margaret in the intensity of her sympathy for Dalton, and now she was suffering almost as much in a keen regret for his absence at such a critical moment. She had distinctly heard the words—"Let him get off the platform and we'll put Dalton on it." What if they were about to reconsider their action and Dalton not here to take advantage of it!

In her fever of anxiety that he should not miss the chance, if there was to be one, she came near begging Hugh to go and find him and inform him of what was going on, that he might at least have the opportunity of accepting or declining his chance as he might please. But the personal note that had this night made itself felt in her relations to Dalton, restrained her. Had hers been such an entirely impersonal interest and admiration as Hugh's, she would have found no difficulty in preferring her request; but her tongue was fettered now, and she

was irritated with Hugh for not himself suggesting to go and hunt up Dalton.

The leaders had succeeded in at last getting the delegates into their places, and the chairman having brought them to order by the stroke of his gavel, was now making an announcement which Margaret strained her ears to hear.

"Gentlemen of the Convention," he said, "Mr. Burton has a message to read to you. Rumors as to what its nature might be, many of them exaggerated, some of them utterly false, have been flying about among the delegates. I hope you will listen to Mr. Burton quietly and with respectful attention, and that you will also accord the same courtesy to Mr. Walters, who will tell you what action the committee, to whom the matter has been entrusted, proposes to take—subject of course to your pleasure."

Mr. Burton stepped forward at once, holding a paper in his hand.

"I received last night," he said, "a telegram from Mr. Berkeley. It was sent after he had received by wire a brief synopsis of the important points in the platform. It came while we were in the very heat of making and seconding nominations. I called aside a few of your leaders and entrusted to them the nature of its contents. It seemed to them and to your chairman best to submit the matter to a committee of Mr. Berkeley's friends for its consideration. I will now read you the telegram and then Mr. Walters will tell you the action the committee has taken upon it."

In a breathless silence he read:

"I have just received the outline of the platform. I am, of course, very far from sure that I will receive the nomination for the Presidency from the convention, and it would be folly on my part to decline such nomination before receiving it. But should I receive it, I ask you immediately thereafter to state to the convention my views on the anti-trust resolution, and should they think that the views of their candidate should not be so opposed to any part of the platform, will you then, for me, give them an opportunity of selecting a candidate more perfectly in accord with the platform.

MARTIN R. BERKELEY."

The excitement as he finished reading was tremendous, and threatened to break out into uncontrollable tumult, but the chairman, with hasty gavel, secured a hearing for himself and begged them to refrain from any expression of opinion either by word or sound, until they should have heard Mr. Walters.

"Mr. Chairman," Mr. Walters began, "when we nominated Martin R. Berkeley for the highest office in the gift of the American people, we knew we were nominating a high-minded gentleman; but I think there were not many among us who realized that so scrupulous was he, almost over-scrupulous it may seem to some of us, that rather than be placed in a false position he would resign the high honor you have bestowed on him. When, ever before in the history of American politics, has too sensitive a spirit of honor led a man to refuse such a prof-

fered gift—the greatest the world has to bestow. We believed that we had nominated a great man and a good one, but we had not measured up to the standard of his greatness. The American people are quick to recognize and respond to such a chivalrous sacrifice to the sense of right, and whereas some of us, who first read his telegram feared it might bring disaster, we now believe it will, instead, arouse such enthusiasm in the minds of the clear-thinking masses as will sweep him on to the polls on the crest of a very tidal wave of victory.

"You note he makes no demand for a change in the platform; he is only supersensitively afraid that you may not have fully understood his views, and had you so understood them, might have preferred another candidate. All honor to such supersensitiveness! All honor to our noble-minded candidate!

"Mr. Chairman, you appointed a committee to determine what action should be taken on this telegram. We have discussed it from every point of view, and have come to an unanimous conclusion that there is but one line of action for us. Subject to the approval of the convention, we propose to send Mr. Berkeley this telegram:

Then he read from a typewritten copy:

"Your views on the anti-trust question are well-known. You are still, in spite of them or because of them, the almost unanimous choice of this convention for the Presidency."

How the delegates would have received this was uncertain. There were the beginnings of applause, as Mr.

Walters finished reading, but at that moment Dalton, pale, and his face in tense lines, walked rapidly down the aisle to his seat. At once the house, delegates and galleries, broke into an uproar with cries of "Dalton! Dalton!" and "Platform! Platform!" Nor would their imperative cries be stilled until Dalton, rising, started swiftly down the aisle for the platform, his face still white and set and his eyes fixed, so that he did not seem to see the hands outstretched to him all along his path. And Margaret, from her box, noting the signs of illness, was ready to wish as ardently that he had not come, as a few moments before she had longed for his coming.

When Dalton had left the hall, less than an hour before, Seton had met him in the lobby and hurried him to his own room in a hotel close to the convention hall. He had hastily summoned a physician also, for it was evident to him that something more than mere fatigue was the matter with Dalton. The physician had just administered such remedies as seemed to be immediately demanded, and was gravely admonishing Seton that the patient must be kept absolutely quiet, as the symptoms indicated that he was threatened with a serious illness, when the door of the room was thrown open and half a dozen excited men burst violently in.

"Dalton," they called at the threshold, "You must come at once! You've got another chance and a good one! That fool Berkeley has sent a telegram threatening the convention that if they don't change the platform he'll resign." Which was not an entirely exact state-

ment, but the truth was probably not willfully perverted, since they were only repeating one of the wild rumors that had been flying about among the delegates.

Dalton was just sinking off into a state of such absolute repose as was half stupor, half sleep. But he was wide enough awake at their words. He sprang at once from his pillow, in spite of the grave admonitions of the physician and Frank's appeals to him to lie down mingled with his angry commands to the intruders to go a away.

"Stop, boys," said Dalton quietly, as the men, seeing how ill he was, turned to slink away in obedience to Frank's continued urgings. "Doctor, I don't believe I'm as ill as you think me. I must hear what they have to say."

In response to his quiet command to them to tell him all about it, one of the men brought forward a correct copy of the telegram, which he had secured from Burton, and read it to Dalton.

"There are any number of the delegates ready to undo their work of an hour ago and put you in Berkeley's place," he added, as he finished reading the telegram, "but I'm afraid you're too ill to go back to the convention."

"Entirely too ill!" the doctor interposed hastily, and Frank added persuasively:

"Now go back boys, please, and let Dalton alone—you can see for yourselves how ill he is, and I suppose you don't want to be the death of him."

But Dalton stayed them with uplifted hand:

"No, wait a minute," he said, "and I'll go with you. Doctor, I know my own strength—I'm perfectly equal to it. Your remedies and these few minutes of rest have done much for me. I'll relieve you of all responsibility in the matter, but I must go and see what is going on. I promise to come back and stay in bed a week if necessary."

There was no gainsaying him. Frank and the doctor continued to make feeble afforts to dissuade him from going, but they were of so little avail that they found themselves instead, helping him with feverish haste to get himself in suitable order for a return to the hall.

Dalton's first feeling on hearing of the telegram had been one of intense indignation mixed with some righteous anger. His second, was a secret exultation. Here was his chance thrown at his feet by his rival; he would be a dolt not to pick it up. The anger and the exultation were still seething together in his veins as, weaker than he had expected to find himself, he entered the convention hall. When, in response to the peremptory demands of the house, he took his seat on the platform, he had some time to think over his course of action, for the hot-headed southerner, who had uttered the hasty words advising Berkeley to get off the platform if he didn't like it, and let them put Dalton on, had evidently been effectually reasoned with by the party leaders, and was now eating his words. Dalton hardly listened to him, his own thoughts were so absorbing. One of his friends on the platform had in a whisper, given him the substance of Walters' speech and the telegram the com-

mittee proposed sending, and he found his thoughts suddenly, with no volition of his own, running in an entirely new channel.

He had at first honestly believed that this was a party scheme to force his resolution out of the platform, and what had seemed to him the low trickery of the whole thing, had roused his intensest scorn and indignation. Into this feeling had entered also a personal one, that he could not see the victory, for which he had toiled through the long hours of that hot night and won in the face of such odds, thus snatched from him at the last moment, without anger and resentment.

But the Southerner was long-winded, and Dalton's emotions had time to cool. Then with his usual fair-mindedness, he conscientiously tried to put himself in Berkeley's place and understand his motives for such an extraordinary action. Reluctantly, he was compelled to relinquish his first point of view. From what he knew of Berkeley he might be guilty of a mistake in judgment, but he could not descend to a low trick. There was no man living to whom an action instigated by a chivalrous, if superfine, sense of honor could appeal to more strongly than to Dalton. He began to feel his first honest glow of admiration for his rival.

But the gentleman from the South had finished at last, and now galleries and delegates would not be denied their demand for Dalton. Seton, who had accompanied him to the hall, had left him at the delegates' entrance and once more sought the party in Margaret's box.

"He has no business to be here," he said to Margaret.

"He is really ill; but there's no use trying to do anything with Dalton when he sets his head. My only consolation is that he will probably snatch the nomination away from Berkeley. Joe Hall is ready, the minute Dalton finishes his speech of arraignment, to spring to his feet and propose a reconsideration of Berkeley's name for candidate; and Dalton no doubt will have worked the delegates up into such a frenzy by that time, that they will be more than ready to wipe Berkeley's name off the slate. Of course, then, Dalton's nomination is assured. I suppose it will pay, but I hope he won't get his death while he's getting the nomination."

Seton's air of mingled gloom and triumph kindled in Margaret the like mixture of incongruous feelings. She watched Dalton, as he came forward to speak, looking white and ill, hardly knowing whether her sense of anxiety or of exultation was the stronger.

The anxiety predominated as he began to speak; for his voice was hoarse and weak and altogether unlike that silver organ whose musical quality alone had first kindled her admiration. But as he went on his voice cleared and the old power came back. Strength from some mysterious source seemed supplied to him in fuller and fuller measure with each trenchant sentence. At the first, even the exacting Seton could not but be satisfied with Dalton's apparent arraignment of Berkeley's motives, and his satisfied smile showed his delight. But as Dalton went on his smile disappeared, his satisfaction gave place to wonder, and at the last to a dismay that would have been ludicrous if it had not been pathetic.

Margaret shared his emotions through most of the speech, but when Seton began to feel dismay, she found herself being stirred to an admiration that grew with each succeeding sentence.

"These," said Dalton, as he concluded his scathing arraignment of the machine to whose scheming he had attributed Berkeley's action, "were my honest convictions when I first heard of the telegram. But I have come to think differently. I have come to believe that Berkeley's only fault has been a mistake in judgment. He should have stated his convictions clearly and emphatically before the meeting of this convention, or at least before the possibility of a nomination. I can excuse even that however," he said with his twinkling smile, "on the plea that he could not for a moment believe there was any real danger of such a resolution being introduced into the platform. The men of the east are prone to the error that they are invincible when they entrench themselves behind any measure, and Berkeley was especially to be excused in such a belief, for no doubt he knew how thoroughly the east had organized the party.

"As I have said, it would have been far better if Berkeley, when his name was first mentioned for the Presidency, had come out in a strong statement that on no condition would he consent to run on a platform embodying such a resolution. But—having neglected to make such a statement—there could be no manlier course left to him than the one he has taken: He gives this convention free rein to elect another candidate if

they do not approve of his views, which in one point run directly counter to the platform. He does not, as I understand, refuse to run on such a platform. Of course, if such were his meaning, there could be but one course left for us to pursue. It is *our* platform!" Dalton's voice rang out like a clarion—"Wrought in the sweat of our brows, written in our heart's blood. No power on earth can move us from the stand we have taken, and in such case there would be but one thing to do—seek a new candidate. But if this message means that, although these are not his views, he will yet, should he become the chief executive of this nation, carry out the views of his party when occasion offers, I see no reason why this convention should reconsider its action of an hour ago. He was your choice then for the Presidency, he should be much more your choice now: for he has shown himself to be a braver man, and one more sensitively alive to a point of honor, than even his friends believed him to be.

"I know," and now there was the slightest shade of regret in Dalton's tones, "there are some in this house who are eagerly hoping that this crisis may give them a chance to reverse your decision and put in nomination their own candidate. To them I say—The moment is not opportune. This is the time to hold up the hands of your party. The die is cast! Berkeley is the choice of the majority, and when, in the history of this grand old party, has it not upheld the voice of the majority! Do not take advantage of the nobility of a man who throws himself without armor upon your generosity, to stab him to death. Above all, do not throw the party we all

love into the throes of disunion and disruption. Let our desire for harmony overrule every other feeling but the determination to maintain the right!"

The effect of his words upon his own followers was inconceivable. They sat aghast; and Joe Hall, who was to have sprung to his feet and made his motion to reconsider, sat as one chained to his chair. There were, indeed, some low mutterings of anger among his friends, that he should have so lightly thrown away his wonderful opportunity—should have betrayed them, they called it—but most hearts had been touched, and there were tears in many eyes at his concluding words.

He did not wait to hear what action would be taken, for, now that his effort was over, he was conscious again of that over-powering sense of weakness and illness that threatened him at any moment with a collapse. He passed swiftly down the aisle, and once more he would not see the hands outstretched to him—this time as many by Berkeley's friends as by his own—but went swiftly and silently by them to the lobby, where Seton, meeting him with no word of greeting but in a silence more significant than many words, hurried him away to the carriage waiting to take him down to his own room at The Southern.

Margaret, up in her box, losing no word of his speech, and watching his swift flight from the convention hall, felt herself alternately consumed with anxiety for his physical condition, and glowing with pride in the nobility of his character, revealed to her as to many others for the first time in its full stature.

But stronger than any other emotion, either of pride or of anxiety, was the keen sensation of pain, under which she winced as from a knife thrust, that not once, from the moment he had entered the hall until he left it, had he glanced in her direction.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN.

Coming out into the full blaze of the morning sun and into the freshness and vigor of the morning air, Margaret felt dazed as if she were coming out from some long entombment, which had yet been of so exciting a nature as to efface all the familiar sensations of life. It was the outside world that seemed unreal to her now. The chattering of the sparrows, the passing of long lines of crowded street-cars with clanging bells, the cries of the newsboys, as they shouted out brief descriptions of the very scenes she had just been witnessing, the greetings of friends hurrying gaily home to breakfast and bed, were all like images in a dream; for the life she had been living for the last ten hours had been so intense and vivid as to make the ordinary events of every day seem like shadows.

But she was the only one of her party that felt dazed. Julie was chatting steadily, and since she had not Seton to talk to, was bestowing upon Helen and Peyton impartially the flow of her words. They were all discussing the events of the night and, as was natural, they were discussing most of all the telegram, and Dalton's attitude towards it. They were full of enthusiasm and admiration for what they called "his act of devotion to his party." Hugh, as usual, was warmest in his praise, for his admiration of Dalton had been steadily growing until now he could find no terms too extravagant in which to express it. Peyton, feeling quite safe about Margaret,

since he had surprised that meeting between her and Hugh in the library, saw no reason why he should withhold a generous meed of praise for Dalton's noble action, and his words were sweeter to Margaret than the extravagant laudations of all the others. She herself had said little, but they had been so full of their theme they had not noticed her silence, or if they had, were so well assured of her sympathy as not to question it. It was indeed very sweet to her to hear Dalton so lauded to the skies, but mingled with the sweetness was the ever present sense of hurt that his ignoring her had caused and the constant remembrance of which affected her like a dull pain, which while it was not an exquisite agony, yet began to seem to her more intollerable.

If anything could sooth that ache it was the walk from the car through beautiful Devonshire Place in the dewy morning; the air sweet with the fragrance of blossoms, and ringing with the songs of linnets and thrushes, and every spear and leaf of the lush green of grass and foliage glittering with dew-drops in the bright sunshine. Hugh, who had begun to fear from Margaret's manner that the fatigues of the night had been too great for her, was glad to see her color coming back and her eyes brightening with every step of the way. As he was about to leave her at her door, she asked him a question she had been trying to find courage to ask all the way home:

"Do you suppose Mr. Dalton will be well enough to go out to Kentwick with you to-morrow, as you expected?"

Hugh was startled.

"Oh, I hope so!" he answered fervently, "I've been

counting on it so. I had not thought of the possibility that he would be too ill to go. I will call at his hotel some time to-day and, if he is not really ill, I shall try to persuade him that there is no such place in which to rest and grow strong as Kent Hall."

"Very well," answered Margaret, smiling at his ardor, "If you succeed, remember our arrangement that we are all to meet here at half past six for a cup of coffee and an early start while the morning is still fresh, and breakfast at Beauvoir when we get there. I hope it will be as lovely a morning as this one."

John, lying in his darkened room at the hotel sunk far below the level of life's noise and confusion, its victories and defeats, its hopes and despairs, in a stupor so profound that it easily suggested to Hugh, admitted to his room for a moment's interview with Seton, that deeper sleep to which we all must come, looked little enough like being ready for the trip to Kentwick in the morning. Seton, camped on a couch at the side of his bed, ready to give any needed service and especially ready, like a faithful watch-dog, to keep out intruders; and incidentally getting a little needed sleep on his own account, did not think it would be possible. But the physician coming in at that moment, and noting the slight moisture that had taken the place of the dry burning of the skin, the quiet and regular breathing and the pulse once more normal, was inclined to think otherwise. He announced authoritatively that, should Dalton awake from this deep sleep refreshed and without fever, nothing could be better

for him than the ride in the morning air before the heat of the day set in, with the rest and quiet of the country to follow.

Six o'clock the next morning found Hugh at The Southern in his motor-car waiting to know whether he was to go back with no passengers or with Dalton and Seton, for Seton had been included in the invitation. Dalton had wakened, as the doctor had expected he would, refreshed from his long sleep, but when Seton reminded him of his engagement with Hugh and told him that the doctor gave his consent to keeping it, Dalton was at first very difficult. He thought his little illness, for in his own mind he regarded it as but very slight, might yet serve as a pretext for abandoning the visit to Kentwick, which now he looked forward to with as much dread as he had at first anticipated it with delight. But Seton, remembering the doctor's advice, and really believing there could be no better way to make Dalton forget his defeat, overruled him; and to Hugh's delight, whose heart was quite set on this visit, he came down on Seton's arm, still white and weak from the effects of fever, but professing himself quite able to undertake the fifteen mile ride.

It was a trial he was hardly yet ready for, as the car turned into Devonshire Place, to find that the arrangements included an early cup of coffee at the Le Beaus. He had never been inside Margaret's home, and he stepped within its doors with something of the feeling of a devotee entering a shrine; and Margaret coming down the grand staircase at that moment, all in white and ra-

diant as the morning, every trace of the fatigue of the long night's vigil having vanished in sleep, might well have seemed to him the shrine's divinity. There was nothing in her manner of greeting Dalton but easy cordiality and the gentle solicitude natural in a hostess towards an invalid guest. Dalton felt himself partially restored to his ease, and the rest of the party coming in almost immediately and surrounding him with eager and warm inquiries for his welfare, he began to rather enjoy the role of invalid which had, at first, seemed to him detestable.

In the bright breakfast room, the morning sun touching up to greater brilliance the bowl of gay garden flowers from Beauvoir that decorated the center of the table, and the fragrant coffee dispelling every remnant of sleepiness that the early hour might have left, there was soon a happy confusion of voices that gave Dalton a sense of cheer and courage far from the feeling with which he had entered the house. He even dared occasionally to let his swift glance rest for a moment on Margaret, though always he was paid for his temerity by a dull heart throb that responded to the suggestion she gave of being sweet home mistress, presiding with such ease and grace at the coffee-service.

He was not sitting beside her; they had seated themselves as they pleased, with a lack of formality belonging to an early cup of coffee, and he had chosen a seat beside Mrs. Paxton, for his acquaintance with her had been longer than with the others and she was nearer his own age, with more of the quiet ease and dignity belonging

to her years and which were soothing to him in his present perturbed state. To Margaret, the fact that he had not chosen a seat beside her when he was free to choose, little as it seemed, sent a quick stab to keep the dull pain company. But pride was beginning to assert itself. No doubt she had misunderstood him, and her sense of mortification that she had too hastily assumed a feeling on his part, kept her from glancing towards him through the meal.

There was not much lingering over their coffee and rolls, and seven o'clock saw the two motor-cars rolling through the gates of Devonshire Place and speeding along the King's Highway a mile or two until they turned west on to the Natural Bridge Rock road. From there on it was familiar ground to John. He had traversed this road but once, but every winding of the way, every hill and valley, had been indelibly impressed upon his memory. There had been many changes, of course, in the sixteen years: roadside inns and country houses had sprung up that were not there then, but the changes were hardly so great as might have been expected. The city had not grown in this direction and it was still a country road, with waving woods and flowery meadows, and pastures dotted with browsing cattle, and dancing streams spanned by picturesque bridges, and with every mile of the swift rush through the fresh sweet air John's pulses beat stronger and his courage steadily rose.

Margaret was sitting beside Hugh just in front of him, and at his side in the tonneau was Julie Delauney. Seton was in the other car with Peyton and Mrs. Paxton, and

he was grateful for the arrangement; for Julie's incessant stream of chatter, directed almost entirely toward Hugh and Margaret, interfered not at all with his thoughts, while it covered his silence. Hugh turned often with anxious inquiries for his welfare, or to point out some special beauty of the view or some interesting landmark, but he had his machine to attend to and must, most of the time, keep on the watch for frightened country teams whose irate drivers must be delicately handled and courteously entreated.

So there was little to break in upon his thoughts and he had time to reason it all out and to settle on some definite line of conduct. He had only to lift his eyes to see Margaret, the soft white of her automobile veil enveloping her head like a fleecy cloud; if he could also as easily have seen what was passing in the brain beneath the veil, it would have been a help to him. He could not forget that glance from his eyes to hers which he rightly regarded an open declaration, and which could not be left unaccounted for. It seemed a long time ago to him; then hope had been beating so high, he felt so sure of his final victory, it seemed no harm to let his eyes speak for him when he intended so soon to speak for himself. But all that was changed. He could not think of bringing to her his defeats and ruined hopes when he had dreamed of bringing victory and a brilliant future. His illness had no doubt helped to make him unduly sensitive. Courage and high hopes had both gone down in the crash and he seemed to himself but a forlorn wreck, an object of pity to the more amiable of his fellow-

men, of scorn to the others. He foresaw that this week's visit was going to be a severe trial to him, and he intended, if possible, on some plea to cut it short. But, he said to himself, he had no intention of slinking out of the consequences of his glance; he should find some means of making Margaret understand how his altered position prevented him from following it up.

Then still deeper depression settled upon him. Margaret had scarcely addressed a word to him since their start, certainly no more than the barest courtesy demanded. Very likely he was presuming in thinking she would expect any explanation from him. Very likely she was trying to make him understand that any relations into which they had unconsciously slipped in the closeness of their association through that long night, must now be all changed. Then, he was the center of interest and laudations, on the possible road to victory; now, he was defeated, discredited, crushed. The Juggernaut had rolled over him, and, no doubt to Miss Le Beau he was as if he had never been.

But the wine of the morning air could not be poured through his lungs and sent racing through his veins without having its due effect. Cling as he might, with an invalid's unreason, to his sense of being ill-treated by the world and to the cherished gloom accompanying that sense, his depression insensibly lightened. Gliding swiftly up hills and sliding smoothly down them, recognizing many a landmark as it flashed by him, he could not but contrast this swift rush through the glorious air with his patient plodding over the same course sixteen

years before. And with those memories returned the vivid picture of the little Peggy who had so generously braved her brother's displeasure for him. The truest way to interpret the woman was by the child. Unless the life of a society woman, spent in a round of frivolities and in an atmosphere of adulation, had changed the child's nature, she was incapable of the fair-weather motives with which he had been charging her. And to his logical mind it at once occurred that there was no more reason why a life spent in achieving social ambitions should have a demoralizing effect than a life spent in achieving political ambitions, into which the sweet poison of adulation entered as insidiously as into the career of a society belle. He could look back on his own life and see that he was not radically changed from the young man to whom Peggy had given a curl, and his spirits went up with a great bound as he decided that she was probably of the same sweet, generous, impulsive nature as the child had been. His course lay plain before him. All the frank, cordial friendliness that an older man might extend to a younger woman it would be his duty and his pleasure to extend to Margaret, and he believed it would be an easy matter to keep out of his manner any hint of a less impersonal feeling.

He had just come to this happy conclusion when they turned into Le Beau Way, and he recognized it at once and knew just how many right angled turns they must make before reaching the entrance to Beauvoir, for he had been informed of the plan to breakfast there. He recognized the Kentwick Club, as they passed it, and he

was in the act of saying to himself—"A long stretch, a turn, another stretch and then the red gravel entrance to Beauvoir, where I frightened Peggy's horses"—when the car made a sudden turn into a road running along a fence through a cornfield. John did not know of this short cut, and so vividly had he been recalling to himself each step of the way, that he could not restrain a sudden start and exclamation of surprise.

Margaret turned quickly and looked at him wonderingly, and Julie exclaimed:

"Why, Mr. Dalton, have you ever been here before?"

"Never!" said John promptly; and he did not consider that he was evading the truth, since he had never been on the Beauvoir estate,but he could not control a twinkle in his eye, as, for the first time during the ride, he caught Margaret's, and pictured to himself her astonishment should he tell her how well he remembered the road and the child, and that he was her "tramp" friend of years ago.

Vague memories stirred Margaret's mind at that twinkle. Somewhere she had seen it before. Perhaps in some pre-existent state she had known Dalton, and as she slowly turned back in her seat and they glided swiftly by the farmhouse, the orchards, the vineyards and the barns, she was racking her brain and evoking every fading memory to account for the familiarity of those smiling eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

MISS MOLLY'S MESSAGE.

There could have been no surer way, for Dalton, of undermining Tia Elisa's prejudices and taking by storm the citadel of her friendship, than by presenting himself to her in the role of an invalid.

She was waiting for them on the side verandah, for Hugh had sounded his horn as they turned into the cornfield to give warning of their approach, and as they swept round the circle at the rear of the house and came to an almost imperceptible stop at the horse-block, the sweet old face, wreathed in smiles of welcome, caught Dalton's glance and attracted him swiftly and powerfully. Hardly less sudden was Tia Elisa's capitulation. When she saw Hugh spring from his place and, hardly waiting to help Margaret down, hasten to give his arm to Dalton, who had stepped out and was helping Julie out, and when she saw him looking white and exhausted —for the ride, while no doubt it had done him a world of good, had also tired him greatly—her motherly heart was filled at once with a pity that with her was always kin to the warmest friendship. She hardly noticed the others with more than a bare and general greeting, in such haste was she to run back to the living room and see that a couch was ready where Dalton might rest from his ride.

Of course he resisted being treated as an invalid, and scorned any suggestion that he was unduly tired. But

there was no withstanding Tia Elisa's gentle imperiousness, and somewhat to his embarrassment and even more to his amusement, he found himself tucked up in motherly fashion on the couch, and the younger people hovering fussily about him with ridiculous proffers of service, and with a kindly intention of relieving his embarrassment, should he be feeling any.

"Let me get you another pillow!" "Oh, do let me bathe your brow with ice water!" "Wouldn't you like a hot-water bag at your feet?" "Take my smelling-bottle, do!" they chanted in chorus.

Tia Elisa, who thought they were taking unwarrantable liberties with so great a man, was scandalized, but John himself, being still of that over-grown boy-nature that enjoys a joke even at his own expense, entered into the spirit of the play with zest.

He noticed that Margaret alone stood aloof, looking on with a smile that strove to appear sympathetic but with difficulty concealed scorn, and John, having decided upon a course of frank friendliness, thought this was the time to begin upon it.

"Miss Le Beau," he said, "you are letting the others do it all; won't you offer to sit beside me and fan me?"

He saw at once that he had blundered, and that Margaret resented his playful speech, which did indeed sound to her like coarse buffoonery, wholly unworthy the ideal she had been cherishing of the man. Still struggling to preserve an air of enjoying the play, she answered him, but his sensitive ear easily recognized the coldness in her tones:

"Certainly, with pleasure. Only permit me first to go upstairs and remove the dust of our ride. Girls, if you think you have made Mr. Dalton sufficiently comfortable, perhaps you would like to get ready for breakfast."

"Go, my children!" said John, dismissing them with a benign wave of his hand. "Do not think of me! Leave me to my fate!"

The stairway ascended from one end of the big living room where John was lying, drowsily enjoying his enforced rest, now that they had left him alone; all the doors and windows open to the sweet soft air, and the peaceful sounds of country life coming to him mellowed by distance.

Margaret, coming down the staircase fifteen minutes later, stopped a moment on the landing as she caught sight of his pale face, looking worn and older than it had seemed to her of late, from lines that had made their appearance within the last two days. He was apparently sleeping, and she was filled with quick compunction that she had allowed herself to feel almost disgust with his attempts at being playful. If, after all he had been through, he had any spirit left for such child's play, she ought to have been glad. She went on down the staircase, stepping lightly so as not to waken him; but the soft swish of her skirts roused John who was not really sleeping.

"Miss Le Beau," he said quickly, "I have offended you. I'm afraid you thought my speech rude, but it was not intended to be; only I am always a blunderer with women, I fear. I have talked to them so little."

"If I was offended," answered Margaret, "it was horrid of me. I hope I am not a nasty little prig, who can not take a joke." Which she was assuring herself was exactly what she had been.

John shook himself loose from his pillows and his rugs and sat erect.

"Your aunt has made a new man of me. I suppose I really needed that forty winks after the long ride—it's absurd how weak a slight illness will leave one. But Miss Le Beau, I will not let you call yourself names, even if you do think you deserve them," and John looked up at her with his laughing eyes to show her how well he had read her thoughts. Then he sprang to his feet with a suddenness that made him giddy for a moment:

"But here! I am letting you stand! Will you not sit down?" and he awkwardly pushed towards her a big chair.

"Oh, no," said Margaret, "If you are really able to be up, you must be getting ready for breakfast. I will send Gaston to take you upstairs," for Gaston was at that moment passing the open door chasing a squawking hen. She called to him and he called back:

"Jes a minit, Miss Margrut. Miss 'Lisa done tole me drive dat ole hen out *quick*, foah she scratch up all her posey seeds."

The minute gave John time to utter a predetermined speech:

"Almost everyone else, Miss Le Beau, has made me a pretty address of welcome to Kentwick; am I to have none from you?"

"Most of all from me," answered Margaret, looking up at him gravely, "I am very proud and happy to have you within the walls of Beauvoir."

Gaston, having driven the old hen back to the chicken yard, came up panting to conduct John upstairs, and gave him no chance to say anything more than an earnest "Thank you."

If it had been a party of boys and girls trooping into the breakfast room, they could hardly have been more noisily merry as they seated themselves about the generous round table, where a dozen could easily have found room without elbowing each other. It was only nine o'clock, but their early rising and their long ride had put an edge on their appetites that their preliminary coffee and roll could not dull. Tia Elisa believed in no modern breakfasts of coffee and rolls, no, nor of eggs and toast. There were delicious melons for a fruit course, fragrant as flowers and tinkling with cracked ice; and there was a wholesome breakfast porridge, swimming in yellow cream for a second course—so far had she yielded to modern tastes—but then came what Tia Elisa called breakfast. Never were there more juicy and toothsome broiled chickens, set on the table before Tia Elisa and served on a great platter in a nest of cresses crisp from the brook that ran through the Beauvoir meadows. The platter of chicken was flanked on one side by a generous dish of creamed potato balls, flecked with parsley, and on the other by a platter of fried mush crisp and golden in color. Margaret poured the coffee into cups as trans-

parent as the cups of Devonshire Place, but more generous in size, and Gaston and Clotilde glided noiselessly back and forth with relays of dainty little breakfast rolls, so hot they must be handled with a napkin; and then, with a quick change of plates, brought in the tender and delicately browned waffles without which last course Tia Elisa considered no breakfast complete. Margaret and Peyton might laugh at her as they would for her substantial ideas of the morning meal; at Beauvoir she had her way, while Margaret and Peyton had theirs in Devonshire Place.

But Margaret and Peyton were doing no scant justice to her bounty this morning and no one else was doing less than they. Hugh and Seton were doing their whole duty staunchly by each course, like men, and the women were doing theirs daintily, as became them, but with a very good will. Save for his morning roll, Dalton had eaten nothing since the evening before that long night session, but now he ate his fruit and his porridge, his chicken and his roll with a return of appetite that surprised him, and left him feeling more like a well man than he had felt in days.

Through the open windows on two sides of the room they looked out into the rich green of midsummer towards the orchards and the vineyards and towards Tia Elisa's quaint, oldfashioned flower garden, a spot of brilliant color amid the green. Dalton was facing the wide door into the living room, and through that door and through the windows beyond was framed in successive arches of foliage, where the limbs of the trees had

been cut away for the sake of the views, and giving it all the effect of an antique triptych, a picture that Constable might have painted. To the left in one arch, were upland meadows dotted with the graceful sheaves of garnered wheat and above and beyond them, the towers of Kent Hall in clustering foliage; to the right, a broad expanse of the Beauvoir fields and meadows, dropping down in rapid slopes to the valley through which the railroad passed, and where, at this moment, a long plume of billowing smoke showed that a train was passing. The central arch, the highest of the three, framed the loveliest picture of all: the long white winding road climbing the distant hill on whose crest the little village of Florrissant perched, the spire of the old French church rising from the midst of the clustering white cottages, half buried in tall old trees, like a good priest with his flock around him pointing the way to heaven.

From the belfry in that distant spire came now the faint and musical sound of church-bells. They had lingered long at the table and at the sound Helen and Julie, who were both good Catholics, excused themselves hastily since they would not miss the morning mass. The Protestants, save Tia Elisa, were not quite so conscientious about their religious duties, but Tia Elisa proposed, since they were too far from their own church to reach it now in time for service, that they should all accompany Julie and Helen to the old French church in the little French village where no protestant spire would dare lift its head.

It was a plan that pleased them all, only Hugh object-

ing that Mr. Dalton was not strong enough to undergo any more fatigue this morning, and while the others went to church he would take him over to Kent Hall and let him rest in his own room. But John would not listen to this:

"Nonsense!" he said, "I am an invalid no longer. Broiled chickens and melons and porridge have done their work, and I am fit for anything. But I've a plan of my own, if you will only accept it. Will you all go to church, please, and let me stay here until you come back? If I can sit out on that verandah for an hour of perfect country quiet and beautiful country views, my cure will be completed."

They were loath to leave him alone at first, Hugh, particularly, feeling that he was not properly playing the host, but John seemed so genuinely and so ardently to desire it for some reason, that they yielded finally and went off in the two motor cars, gliding smoothly down the red gravel of the drive and waving their good-byes to John, at ease in a comfortable chair on the verandah.

He had really desired it. An hour alone with the perfect peace and beauty of Beauvoir, it seemed to him, would be the best tonic in the world, and, moreover, he greatly needed a little time for thinking. His thoughts were still in the confusion in which his brief illness had left them and he felt it was time to straighten them out. He had some political problems to meet—the course he would take in the coming campaign being the one that he knew the party leaders were anxiously questioning and that he must soon decide—but he was not just now

going to trouble himself about politics. It was his personal affairs that were disturbing him. He had found, in the brief hours he had spent at Beauvoir, it was going to be more difficult for him than he had supposed to keep up the mask of frank and unconcerned friendliness towards Margaret that he had proposed for himself. Here, in the home of her childhood, his thoughts were constantly reverting to the little Peggy of old; and the beautiful woman of to-day was confused in his thoughts with the lovely child of other days in a fashion that made her infinitely more attractive to John and left him still more defenselessly at her mercy.

He listened to the chug-chug of the machines as they turned from the drive into Le Beau Way. Intervening trees and shrubbery on the wide lawn and the high hedge at its boundaries screened them from his sight, but listening, he could easily tell when they had turned the first right angle that he remembered so well and were now on their straight way to Florrissant. He waited till he could see in the distance two toy cars climbing the white road to the spire among the trees, and then, with the air of a school boy guiltily sneaking off, intent on forbidden pleasures, he glanced around him to be sure the coast was clear and, with an exaggerated air of indifference, descended from the verandah and sauntered across the lawn towards the red gravel drive.

He was curiously eager to revisit that steep turn into Le Beau Way where he had met the child for the second time. There it was—the turn not quite so steep perhaps as memory had pictured it, but steep enough to have

caused disaster had he not been there to prevent what he had himself precipitated. He sat down under the spreading oak that sentinelled the entrance to the Beauvoir grounds, and went back in thought to the young man who had talked to the child that day. He remembered his high hopes and his vaulting ambitions, and he remembered too, the dauntless energy and the weary days and nights of toil that had won for the boy the fruition of his hopes. Was it all dead fruit? Was this the glittering goal toward which that boy—he was thinking of him tenderly, as one he had known and loved and lost—was striving so eagerly? Defeated, crushed by the machine, discredited with his party! The people had loved him, but he knew too well the fickleness of the people! Their love would not long survive his loss of prestige and power. Was this the end?

There was a poem John had read once, which, like everything that made any impression upon him, clung to his memory. He did not like it; it had always haunted him with a prophecy of coming doom. It was of the zenith once reached, that thereon the path must be downward: The beautiful woman sees herself one time in the glass in the very zenith of her charms, but never again are the eyes so bright, the cheeks so smooth and delicately tinted, wrinkles and grey hairs follow soon: The wonderful singer sings once as she has never sung before, ravishing the hearts of all who listen; from that hour the voice begins to fail, until she, who moved men to madness with her music, could only move them to derisive laughter. He had always resented the theory

and he had wondered that one who could sing so perfectly of the true, the good and the beautiful, should send out into the world such fatalistic verses to depress the minds of men who need rather to be uplifted. Moreover he had denied their truth: For him there should be no zenith—but to the very end his path should be onward and upward. For the first time he began to fear they might be true. Had he not passed his zenith? Would he ever again see thousands go wild at the sight of him, hang on his lips as if from them came the words of life, and shout his name with all the abandon of idolatrous affection? Was his path henceforth to lead steadily downwards until it should be lost in obscurity and he himself forgotten; but a name to arouse men's derision?

They were not cheerful musings. John's eyes had been fastened on the turf at his feet, now he lifted them, and through the green of the leaves above him he saw the deep blue of the midsummer sky with stray wisps of fleecy white gently drifting over it. John shook himself and flung back his head with his old gesture. "It's false!" he said to himself, "I'll stick to my old motto—victory out of defeat!" And then he added with a wistful smile—"But I'll have to give up Peggy for the present and perhaps the other fellow'll get her."

As he rose to start back to the house, his glance fell on a figure coming up the road that had a strangely familiar air. He had seen Miss Molly but once, but there was no doubt in his mind that this was Miss Molly—the briskness of her walk, the neatness of her dress, the animation of her countenance, plainly visible at this distance when

he could scarcely distinguish a feature, could belong to no other. He waited for her to come up and saw in her face that it was her intention to turn into Beauvoir. He took off his hat in response to the usual country greeting from her—"Howdy!"

"I'm just goin' up to Beauvoir a minute," Miss Molly continued, with a feeling that her presence demanded an explanation, "to see Miss Margaret and Mr. Peyton. I've got a message for them."

"They are not at home," said Dalton. "The family has gone to church."

"For the land's sake!" said Miss Molly politely, and in her company style, without drawl or emphasis. Then a sudden suspicion entered her mind.

"They didn't go to Franklin, or I'd have seen them pass the house!"

"No," said Dalton, "They went to Florrissant."

Miss Molly sniffed audibly:

"I don't call *that* goin' to church, I call it goin' to mass," she said severely. Miss Molly had no patience with Protestants who went to Catholic services, and considered that in so doing they had done their Sunday morning duty. "You don't ketch them comin' to *our* church," she was wont to argue with such weak sticklers for their own religious respect.

Dalton had no views of his own on this subject and so, as he offered none, Miss Molly was deprived of the pleasure of using her favorite argument, which she regarded as a clincher. Instead he said:

"Can't I deliver your message for you? Or will you

come up and wait until they return?"

Miss Molly wanted to wait. It was not often that she found time for a visit to Beauvoir, and it was a hot and dusty walk from her home in the little village of Kentwick, or even from the station-house which was this side of the village. She was quite sure Mr. Peyton would find some way of sending her home and so save her the heat and fatigue of the return walk. But she had also a fine sense of propriety, and in her code it was hardly the correct thing to spend the quarter, or possibly half hour, she would have to wait, talking to a strange man to whom she had not been introduced. This code did not, of course, apply to the station-house—there she was an official and at home, and had Dalton put in an appearance there she would have thought it her duty as well as her pleasure to entertain him to the best of her ability, whether introduced or not.

Dalton saw her hesitation and thought he understood it.

"I hope you will decide to come up to the house and wait; they'll be home very soon, I am sure," he said, and then he added—"This is Miss Molly, isn't it?"

"For the l-a-n-d-s *sake!*" ejaculated Miss Molly, startled out of her company style this time. "How *d'you* know who I was?"

"Oh, I have heard of you," said John, smiling, "And let me introduce myself; then we can talk at our ease—my name is Dalton."

"For the l-a-n-d-s *SAKE!*" said Miss Molly, this time with triple emphasis. "Are *you* Dalton? Why, I'd

never have dreampt it! I supposed he was quite an elderly gentleman—middle-aged like, at least!"

If Miss Molly had been the most consummate of flatterers, she could have found no words that would have pleased John so well. At the very moment that he was feeling old and past his zenith, to have her innocent testimony to his appearance of youth, soothed and comforted him immeasureably. All men are vain, and great men a little vainer, perhaps, than others; for the greater a man is the more childlike he is, and the vanity of a man is but the naiveté of his childhood remaining to him in his manhood in greater or less measure, in proportion to the simplicity of his nature. John had his share of vanity, and Miss Molly's simple words did more to heal his wounded self esteem and renew his courage than the intentional cheer of a wiser friend.

After that, there was nothing would do but Miss Molly must wait; and they turned and walked up to the house together under the shade of the avenue of lindens and maples, the load in John's breast growing lighter every moment in listening to Miss Molly's simple chatter. They sat down on the verandah and so beguiling was Miss Molly, that although the beautiful picture of the Florrissant church framed in its arch of foliage was just before him, he did not see the two motor cars come down the winding white hill-road, and it was Miss Molly who first heard their faint chug-chug in the distance.

"There they come!" she exclaimed, and a moment later they heard Hugh's horn blown at the first right angle of Le Beau Way to announce their coming. They

swept up the gravel drive in grand style, Peyton bringing up the rear alone in his car, for he had left Seton and Julie and Helen at Kent Hall.

"Howdy, Miss Molly, howdy!" Peyton and Hugh called from a distance, waving their hats to her. Miss Molly kept up a quick succession of excited little nods wreathed in smiles until the two cars stopped at the verandah and Margaret ran up the steps and kissed her warmly, and Tia Elisa, following more sedately, kissed her just as heartily, and Hugh and Peyton made an exaggerated pretense of being about to follow their example.

Miss Molly was not afraid; she knew there was no danger of their carrying out their threat, but she liked to draw quickly back and bridle like a girl while she uttered her favorite exclamation:

"For the l-a-n-d-s *sake!*" Behave yourselves, can't you? Anybody'd think you were two big boys from the way you carry on."

Tia Elisa and Margaret insisted she must take off her hat and stay to dinner, but that was impossible. Miss Molly must be back to the station in time for the one o'clock train to San Carlos, and of course if she had to be on duty at the station there was no use in insisting, and Miss Molly reminding herself that it was time she was getting back, Hugh offered to run her down in his car.

"I'll just drop Mr. Dalton at the house, Miss Molly, it won't take a minute longer, and then I'll run you on down in plenty of time for your train."

"No, if you please," interposed John, "I'm not to be arbitrarily deprived of any of Miss Molly's society. I'll go with you both to the station."

Miss Molly, in a delightful flutter at the stir she had been making, and particularly at so gallant a speech from so great a man, seated herself in the tonneau with Dalton beside her, and Hugh cranked his engine.

"Did you deliver your message?" inquired John.

"For the l-a-n-d-s sake, *no!*" exclaimed Miss Molly, with a frightened glance at John and a guilty blush. For it had been solely to catch a glimpse of the great Dalton that she had offered to carry the message, and in the excitement of satisfying her curiosity so thoroughly, she had entirely forgotten it.

"Mr. Hugh, wait a minute, please," she said hurriedly. "Mr. Peyton," calling up to him where he stood at the verandah rail, "I've a message I most forgot to deliver. French Jean went down to the city on the eight o'clock this morning and he asked me, if I saw any of the folks from Beauvoir or Kent Hall, to tell them there's another fine possum in the South Woods, and if you'd like to go after it to-morrow night, the moon'll be all right by twelve o'clock."

There was no time to stop for a discussion if they would get Miss Molly to the station in time for "the one o'clock," but Hugh called back from his driving seat in the car:

"That possum belongs to Margaret and me, Peyton, but you're all coming to tea this evening and we'll talk it over."

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE SOUTH WOODS.

They talked it over to such good purpose, that French Jean was notified to have everything in readiness by twelve the next night for a start from Beauvoir, where the meet was agreed upon, since it lay directly in the route from Kent Hall to the South Woods.

Frank and John talked it over in John's room in the afternoon where Frank had come for a little smoke and quiet talk. The Beauvoir people would be over to tea when it would be fully discussed and settled, and John wanted his decision made before that time.

"I'm not going to the possum hunt," said John, in a tone of finality that seemed to admit of no discussion.

"No," answered Frank regretfully, "I was afraid you wouldn't feel up to it."

"Nonsense!" said John with unusual irritation, for he was growing very tired of the role of invalid. "I'm up to anything, as far as my health goes. Another day of this Kentwick air and I'll be in better condition than I've been for months."

"Why don't you go then?" was Frank's very natural query.

"Oh, I'm too old and—settled, I suppose you'd call it, for such a youthful frolic."

"It's my turn to say 'nonsense,'" said Frank. "You're not as old as I, and a precious little older than either Le Beau or Kent."

"Oh, I know, in years. But they've spent their lives doing nothing but amusing themselves. It's toil and care and striving after power that age a man. I feel twice as old as either of them, and while it seems right enough for them, it would seem foolish for me."

"Oh, come!" said Frank coaxingly, "If you're really all right and you think it wouldn't tire you too much, it's just the thing you need. 'The bow that's always bent,' you know."

"Perhaps you're right," answered John slowly, "perhaps what I need is a thorough unbending, but—I don't want to go. I don't want to take a moonlight ride with Miss Le Beau."

John blurted this out with the air of one making an unwilling but predetermined confession.

"I don't understand," said Frank wonderingly, searching his friend's face for some light on this strange whim. "I should have supposed nothing could delight you more."

"Nothing could be a greater trial," responded John briefly.

Frank was non-plussed. Could John have been "jilted"! And whereas, a week ago, Frank would have said—"Served him right"—now his soul seethed in sympathy for his friend and indignation toward Margaret for her treatment of the great Dalton. Also, he was greatly embarrassed. What was the proper thing for him to do in such a case? Ought he, or ought he not, express to John his sympathy?

"Did she—did Miss Le Beau—turn you down?" he

asked haltingly, after an interval of silence.

John glanced at Frank and saw the anxious and indignant scowl on his honest face. He laughed lightly, but with some bitterness that his friend's quick ear detected:

"No, but no doubt she would if she got the chance, and I don't want to give it her. Can't you see what a terrible temptation a moonlight ride through the woods with her would be to me to make a fool of myself?"

"Yes," said Frank with a quick beat of his pulse; for was he not to be subjected to the like temptation? And if Julie Delauney was not so superb a creature as Margaret Le Beau, Frank had to confess to himself that he had begun to find her irresistible. Then he went on gravely:

"But I think, John, you are doing Miss Le Beau a great injustice if, as I suppose, you think she would be influenced in her answer by your defeat in the convention. She has not impressed me as a woman who would be a fairweather friend."

"Oh no, no," said John quickly. "I did not mean to make any such accusation. I was only thinking of my own side of it. You don't expect me, I suppose, to offer a woman like that my ruined hopes and wrecked ambitions."

"I don't know," said Frank slowly, and then he added diffidently, "I didn't know, John, that you had got so far along in so short a time. Couldn't you take it a little more slowly and give yourself a chance to get over the convention, and in the meantime see all you like of her

and enjoy the seeing? 'Take the good the gods provide thee.'"

"I believe, Frank," said John, turning on his elbow and looking up to Seton, for in spite of his asservations that he was no invalid, a rest in the hot afternoon on this luxurious couch had seemed very good to him, "I believe I can go further in a shorter time than any man living. I have known Miss Le Beau not quite a week, and there are no lengths my feeling for her would not carry me if I would give it rein. There! Do you think me a headlong fool?"

"No," said Frank, "I understand perfectly. It's your impetuosity that has always been your power—though for an impetuous man, you have also wonderful self control. But it's partly the unusual way in which you've been associated with her through this week. The exciting scenes of the convention have brought you closer together than a year of ordinary intercourse. I shouldn't wonder if she'd gone just as far herself."

He said this last with a purpose and he glanced keenly at John as he said it. The shot told, and John paled a little. Then he answered quietly;

"Oh, I hope not, but if she has, she'll get over it. Time and absence are great healers—and—the continued presence of Mr. Kent would help I think."

"John! You're not descending to jealousy, I hope?"

"No, I really mean it; and that's where a large part of the rub comes in."

"But he's such a boy—or worse, he's nothing but one of your society swells, and I do Miss Le Beau the honor

of thinking she would expect a little more than that in the man she marries."

"You're mistaken. I thought so myself at first; but I've come to see that he's an honorable, manly, large-hearted fellow, and, I fancy, honestly in love with his neighbor of Beauvoir."

Frank dismissed the subject with an impatient frown:

"Well, I hope you'll change your mind about the possum hunt. There's no reason in the world why we old fellows shouldn't be boys again once in a while. Perhaps Miss Le Beau will change it for you this evening at tea."

Miss Le Beau did change it. John had made a stout stand for a while against the combined persuasions of the party, though he would not plead the one excuse they would all have accepted—his health. But Margaret, who sat next him, found a chance to say to him under a friendly confusion of talk:

"I'm greatly disappointed, Mr. Dalton. I've been counting on you for this ever since French Jean's message this morning. Even if you don't care for possum hunts, I'm sure you would like a ride through our great South Woods by moonlight."

Margaret looked up with her sweetest smile as she said it, deliberately determined to see what she could accomplish where others had failed. Through the long afternoon at home she had come to a conclusion that the change in Dalton's manner, over which she had pondered much and which had deeply wounded her, was due to sensitiveness over his defeat. She determined to show

him that that carried no weight with her, and she blushed to think that her manner, which was only a reflection of his, might have led him to think that it had. It was, as she said, a keen disappointment to her to hear Dalton decline to go on the hunt, for she had decided that if there should be no other opportunity to prove to him that she was unchanged there would certainly be many of them in the moon-lit woods. Her eyes and her smile, therefore, had all the winning pleading she knew how to put into them and which reminded John so strongly of the child Peggy that he could not resist them.

"Really and truly disappointed?" he asked, smiling down on her paternally as he always did when she reminded him of Peggy.

"Really and truly," said Margaret smiling back at him, "Cross my heart!"

"Well then, of course, I'll go," he answered heartily. "I didn't suppose an old fellow like me would make any real difference. In fact, I rather thought you might have a better time without me—perhaps I'd be a bit of a drag."

Margaret smiled and shook her head:

"You *couldn't* think that," was all she said, and try as he might, John could not keep quite all of his heart out of his eyes. There was enough of it in his glance to make Margaret turn away quickly, and John, to cover his own confusion, called out to Hugh:

"I've reconsidered, Mr. Kent. Miss Le Beau has proved to me that I'm not as old as I thought I was, and that at any rate it's a very good thing to be a boy again

just for to-morrow night."

The moon was an old one—though not so old but that it was still equal to shedding a fairly good light—and it had but lately risen as the little party swept round the circle, past the barns and into the corn-field road.

John was glad Margaret was not riding cross-saddle. He had an old-fashioned liking for a graceful woman on a side saddle. Margaret in her short trim skirt, sitting as if she were a part of old Nell, careless of whether she happened to be cantering, racking, single-footing, or galloping, holding her reins lightly and her crop firmly, in the highest spirits racing ahead and calling back a laughing challenge to any one who could to catch her, was a delight to his eyes. He was riding the only horse that could have caught Old Nell, for since he was the guest of honor, Hugh had given him his tall hunter Selim. But he did not accept her challenge; it was Hugh, the loyal, riding a rather sorry scrub, having given his second best mount to Seton, who dashed after her and caught up with her as she turned into the sunken lane leading past the Kentwick Club.

The overhanging hedges threw the lane in deep shadow, but the horses knew every step of the way and did not slacken their pace. Margaret and Hugh could not forget the last time they had ridden that road together and neither had a word to say. They turned into the woods at the little path that led to the leaf-clogged brook, for it was the edge of the great South Woods they had skirted on the day of their ride. At the brook they

were forced to wait, for from there many paths diverged into the depths of the forest, and they were not sure which one French Jean would take. It was a haunted spot for both of them, but Margaret was covering her embarrassment by talking excitedly and gaily to a listener who for the life of him could not utter a word. Fortunately for both, French Jean was not far behind them, and as he came up Margaret proposed to him that they should go on, leaving Hugh to show the others which path to take.

South Woods was the largest bit of virgin forest left in the county, and so wide and deep was it with so many paths crossing and recrossing, it was an easy place in which to lose one's way. It was a forest of oaks and walnuts and hickories and as free from underbrush through most of its extent as a gentleman's park. The moon was high enough by this time to pierce the canopy of foliage above their heads wherever a broken limb or blasted tree gave entrance to its rays, and so diffused a somber twilight beneath the branches.

But the possum had evidently got wind of their coming and had determined to lead them a long chase. They rode for miles up one woodland path and down another, following in the wake of French Jean's much vaunted dog who tore wildly in one direction only to double on his tracks and tear as wildly in the other. It didn't make any difference, for, as Margaret said, the fun of a possum hunt was in the hunting, the treeing part she didn't like. Sometimes they all took different trails, hallowing at intervals to keep track of each other, and

coming together again at points of rendezvous as if they were executing the intricate figures of a contra-dance. Picking their way carefully along rocky and narrow trails, slowly climbing steep hill-paths or galloping madly where a clear space gave them a chance, grey shadowy figures in the dim light under the trees, they might have been a party of ghosts holding high carnival, except that ghosts are reputed noiseless and they made the woods ring with their laughter and shouting.

In all the kaleidoscopic shifting of the shadowy figures, Dalton never lost sight of one whose peculiar grace, apparent even in its dim outlines, assured him it was Margaret's. Sometimes, when the obscurity was too great to distinguish even so faintly one figure from another, it was by her ringing laugh, or sometimes by a high and musical halloo that he kept track of every movement and knew just where she was and what she was doing, no matter by whose side he might be riding.

Selim was far too spirited a hunter for a possum hunt, though for chasing the fox across country he had no equal, taking the highest fence or the widest ditch with ease. Dalton began to find he had his hands full to keep him down to this quiet work, and so, when chance offered, he let him dash off from the party and back again to give ebulition to some of his high spirits. Returning from one of these dashes to where he expected to find the party, he found only one slim grey figure awaiting him, and the pounding of his heart assured him who it was almost before his eyes had taken in its outlines.

Margaret called to him as he came up:

"They think they have found the possum and they are all off after him. I told them I would wait for you and show you the way."

But whether in the obscurity Margaret made a mistake in the opening or whether she willfully took the wrong path, the farther they rode on the fainter and more distant became the shouts of their friends. Dalton at first did not notice this, for Margaret was exerting every power to charm him only too successfully. When it did force itself upon his attention, he drew rein at once.

"Miss Le Beau," he asked, "Are you sure you know the way? I'm afraid we're on the wrong path."

"It is barely possible," said Margaret, with no pretense of anxiety, "But if so, we have only to retrace our steps and take the other fork."

Dalton was nervously anxious not to seem to either Margaret or the others in the party to be seeking a tete-a-tete with her and would have hurried her along over their return course. But Margaret was willful.

"Why do you hurry? Do you want to be in at the treeing? I would rather miss it—I'm always so sorry for the poor possum."

There was nothing to do but to curb Selim who was as nervously anxious as his rider to rejoin the others, and since this little detour was none of his seeking, John swiftly changed his attitude and determined to enjoy it to the full. Margaret felt the subtle change and it gave her courage to start a less impersonal theme—for Dalton had made no reference to the convention and

Margaret feared he might think her lacking a little in delicacy if she were the first to try to take up the threads where they had been broken off. Yet she was even more afraid that he might be suffering from her own silence and misunderstanding it, since he might consider that he had a right to expect some expression of sympathy for him in his defeat. At least she was not going to fall short in her part.

"I have not had a chance, Mr. Dalton, to tell you," she began gently, "how keenly I felt your losing the nomination—do you mind my telling you that I am still very unreconciled?"

Dalton felt himself wince as she touched his hurt, but he perceived too the spirit in which it was done, and the courage required for the doing, and was moved by it. He was not going to play the coward where she was so brave.

"I ought not to mind—I ought to be very grateful," he answered, "And I am grateful, Miss Le Beau, but it is still, for some reasons that you cannot understand, a very sore spot."

"Oh, I am sorry if I have hurt you!" Margaret spoke quickly, with swift remorse in her tones.

"You have not hurt me half as much as you have helped me." And Margaret was sure from his tones that if it had been light enough she would have seen that smile she liked the best,—the whimsical one. "It is like the surgeon's knife—it hurts, but it heals."

"Then you will let me say one thing more?" asked Margaret, still more gently.

"You may say anything in the world, Miss Le Beau, that you find in your heart to say," answered John fervently.

"I wanted to tell you—how I—" Margaret halted a little—it was harder than she had expected, to say words of praise to this man. He might think it fulsome, and that would be execrable; or he might think she was pitying him, and that would be unendurable. She began again:

"I wanted to tell you how proud of you we all were when you came back and made that speech about the telegram. I had heard them say you had another chance for the nomination, and I was so afraid you would miss it I was ready to go after you myself and bring you back. But when you came, and then when you threw it away in the grand way that you did, I was prouder of you than if you had won it. It was a thousand times better than being President! and I gloried in it!"

Margaret had forgotten the "we" she had started out with, and Dalton had never heard sweeter words. Especially did the "I" into which she had so quickly dropped thrill him, but he did not know how to answer her without saying too much. There were burning words at his very lips struggling for utterance, and the restraint he had to put upon himself made the words he used seem very cold and tame indeed.

"You and your friends have been very kind to me, Miss Le Beau," he began, "and I hope you will believe that I greatly appreciate it." Then he was silent a moment, making a rapid mental decision and trying to find

the right words in which to express it. The silver-tongued orator, who did not mind talking to thousands, and knew exactly on the platform how to say the right thing in the right way, found himself awkward and halting when his only audience was a young and beautiful woman.

"Miss Le Beau, I've been wanting to say to you, and this seems to be my opportunity, that losing the nomination has tied my tongue. There were many things I had counted on saying to you if I had won it—some of them you may feel you had a right to expect me to say—but that has changed everything. I was mad to have counted on it so securely and, counting on it, to have gone as far as I did. I am glad to have this chance to make my very humble apologies to you, and having made them let us, please, dismiss the convention and its consequences forever."

Now was Margaret in the greatest straits she had yet known. She had spent her life—or such part of it as belonged to young womanhood—in skillfully avoiding proposals of marriage. It was the penalty she paid for being beautiful and charming, and perhaps also for being rich, having men always imagining themselves ardently in love with her and eager to declare their love; and she rather prided herself on the skill and adroitness with which she had prevented most of such declarations. Hugh, of course, was an exception. She had grown to expect his periodical proposals and had not minded them until this last one, when she had suddenly become alive to their seriousness. Now she found herself playing the

role she had heretofore most despised—the role of a woman "drawing on" a man. Moreover, she was feeling no shame or self-scorn—she was glorying in it. And all because she perfectly understood that this man had been so deeply wounded in his self esteem by his defeat, as to feel himself no longer in a position to dare to say what his eyes had once said for him. She would restore him to his self esteem. She would show him that if all the world had forsaken him she had not, and she was as ready now to listen to his words as she had been before to receive and return his glance.

Margaret's voice was set to a low musical pitch with contralto tones vibrating through it, and with that adorable little break in the register that sometimes goes with a contralto voice. A woman with such a voice has an instrument to play upon that sets a man's heartstrings irresistibly vibrating in response. It is as compelling as the song of the thrush among birds. Yet John, every pulse leaping, every fibre of his soul thrilling in response to those low musical tones, steeled his heart against them.

"I do not know what you think I have a right to expect you to say, Mr. Dalton, but I do not admit that your defeat has changed in any way *your* right to say what you will, and I will listen to it as freely and as gladly as if you had won the nomination." And then in a still lower voice, with still richer vibrations:

"There is only one thing that could matter; if you had changed—if you had lost the desire to say it."

Could there be bolder or balder wooing! Margaret

did not lose her courage nor weaken in her determination, but neither could it be possible to her to utter such words without feeling the blood rushing in waves to her face, while more than once her voice faltered and broke.

John could not see the waves of color but he could hear the faltering tones. His very soul was torn to atoms, such a struggle was going on within him between his desires and his sense of right, yes—and his pride. In a blind impulse of flight from temptation he put the spurs into Selim and dashed ahead for a brief space, leaving Margaret to follow slowly, wondering whether, after all, she had not understood him and she should die of mortification at the thought, or whether, as she secretly believed and glowed with triumph in the belief, his flight was but a tribute to the overmastering power of his emotions.

John's flight was brief. He brought Selim to a standstill at the fork of the roads where they had taken the wrong one, and waited for Margaret to come up. There was a tiny clearing at the fork and the moon's rays, quite strong now, made a circle of light in which John stood. Margaret could see his face sternly set and his eyes glowing with repressed fires.

"Miss Le Beau," he almost groaned as she came slowly up to him, "You make it very hard for me! You do not know what you are saying!"

Margaret had brought Nell to a standstill in the circle of light. She looked up at him shyly, but with a sweet audacity no mortal could withstand.

"Yes, I know what I am saying," she murmured.

John was mortal—he flung his scruples to the winds and with a swift gesture of abandonment and a low inarticulate cry, he bent towards Margaret and reached out to grasp her hands. But Margaret slightly shook her head and touched Nell with her crop, so that she started forward and carried her beyond the circle of light into the other fork of the road. She had been facing it and now had seen the advanced member of the party —whose voices, gradually growing nearer, they had been for some moments hearing without heeding—come round a bend in the path, bringing herself and John, standing in the circle of light, into his full view. And the advance member of the party was Peyton!

The others were close behind him and they came up eagerly announcing the capture of the possum and in the same breath voicing their regrets at Margaret's and Dalton's absence from the final victory, with wondering inquiries as to what had become of them.

Margaret took it upon herself to answer, for Dalton could not so quickly recover from the storm and stress through which he had just been passing. She spoke carelessly:

"I had to wait for Mr. Dalton, you know, and then we took the wrong road and had just come this far on our return. I'm sorry Mr. Dalton missed being in at the brush, though I'm rather glad on my own account. But who got him?"

"Oh, Hugh, of course," answered Julie. "Don't you remember, Margaret, he was always the one to 'shin' up the tree?"

"Yes," added Seton, "and he did it as easily and bagged the possum as neatly as if he had been doing it every day for the last ten years."

"It's a fine one, Margaret," said Hugh, riding up close to Nell with his bag, "and he belongs to you. What shall I do with him?"

"Oh, give him to French Jean, of course," said Margaret laughing, "And Caroline can have possum gravy and sweet potatoes for supper. But tell him to save the tail for me—I'll keep it for the sake of auld lang syne when I used to be the proud possessor of a string of possum tails every year."

Through all the confusion of talk, Peyton had not uttered a word; he had only darted quick and angry and suspicious glances at Dalton, who, perceiving them and knowing that Peyton must have seen his swift movement towards Margaret, and had probably formed from it a conjecture that did not please him, yet received the glances imperturbably.

CHAPTER XXI.

STORM AT BEAUVOIR.

They had ridden farther in the wake of the erratic possum than they had realized, and by the time they had emerged from the shadows of South Woods on to the country road, day was beginning to break. The gibbous moon was paling toward the west, there were faint rosy streaks in the east, and higher up a soft glow of amethyst through which the morning star was shining, serenely golden.

Their ranks were now in confusion, there was no especial "pairing off," and so no reason why John should not ride up beside Margaret, on whose other side was Hugh, and he considered that there were two reasons why he should do so. The first was not a very worthy one, perhaps. Peyton's suspicious glances had irritated him, and he had a weak desire to show him that he did not fear them by braving his further displeasure in openly seeking Margaret. His second reason was the stronger one: the pale rose and violet glow of the dawn, the calm radiance of the morning star brought vividly back to him that hour in the committee room. Margaret was talking and laughing with Hugh; he was afraid the beauty of the dawn was being lost upon her. It had come to be a sacred hour to him, and he wanted her to note its beauties, and especially to note the morning star, which since that hour would always be to him a symbol of her.

"Miss Le Beau," he said, as he rode up beside her,

"have you ever seen the morning star before?"

"Not often," answered Margaret, turning to him and bestowing upon him a smile of pleased appreciation of his boldness, "until this morning but once, I believe, in many years; and that once was only a few days ago."

"What day, please?" asked John quickly, startled into abruptness by a sudden suspicion that filled him with keen delight.

"What day?" repeated Margaret, wondering a little at his signs of excitement, "Oh, it was the morning of that all-night session of the Resolutions Committee. I remember thinking, as I stood at the window looking out at the star, that you were probably down in the hot city hard at work."

Margaret wanted him to know that she had thought of him, and Dalton showed his appreciation by a flashing smile of gratitude. But some other thought was stirring him deeply.

"Strange!" he murmured, and then he questioned again:

"How did you happen to be awake at that hour?"

"That was really very odd," she answered. "I was awakened suddenly by someone calling my name. I was sure I heard it and I was wide awake in a moment. But I know now it was only a dream, probably the rays from the star shining in my face woke me."

"Yes," said John, gazing curiously at her and shaking his head gently, "it was only a dream."

Hugh looked at him. Was Dalton a little queer, he wondered. Certainly his manner was peculiar this

morning. John saw the look and recovered himself with an effort. He had been for the moment oblivious of Hugh's presence, so startled was he at the thought that when, in that early dawn, his soul had called Margaret's name, her soul had heard and responded. He longed for an opportunity of telling her about it, and swiftly resolved that sometime through the coming day he would make it. Now he dropped back a little, and let Margaret and Hugh go on ahead of him.

It was an ill-timed move, and fraught with disastrous consequences. Peyton, who had, as John was sure, seen his gesture of abandon towards Margaret, had kept strict watch on him ever since. He had had his moments of kindly feeling towards Dalton, but they were not when he was showing any special interest in Margaret and Margaret apparently reciprocating the interest. He had the born aristocrat's irreconcilable repugnance to any close personal relations with a man from the people; and particularly now, when the affair on which he had set his heart was progressing so favorably, as he thought, did he resent anything that might distract Margaret's thoughts from Hugh.

It occurred to him that it might be well to give Dalton to understand the relation between these two—for Peyton did not for a moment doubt the engagement It might be done delicately and in such a manner as would be no special breach of confidence towards Margaret. There had been nothing to repay his watch while they were riding through the defiles of the woods—since for most of the way they must go single file and the only

conversation permissible must be carried on in a half shout. But he had seen Dalton riding boldly up beside Margaret as soon as they had struck the county road and the signs of unusual excitement on Dalton's part as the result of the brief conversation between him and Margaret had not escaped him. He had put his horse to the gallop, intending to ride up by Dalton and engage him in a conversation that should draw him away from Margaret's side, when Dalton fell back voluntarily and gave him his opportunity.

"So you missed being in at the death, Mr. Dalton," said Peyton courteously, as he drew up by his side. "It's a little like the play of Hamlet without the prince, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," replied John as courteously. "I'm sorry to have missed it, but we took the wrong fork."

"I'm sorry too," Peyton responded truthfully. "The treeing is always a great excitement. It's something too, to see Mr. Kent go up a tree after a possum. I don't know how he keeps so limber. He's only a little younger than I, and I should make sorry work of it with my stiff joints."

Then, determined to get in his hot shot before any one should come up and interrupt them, he went on glibly:

"I was especially sorry to have Margaret miss it on Hugh's account. I suppose a man always likes to shine in the eyes of his fiancée and it must have taken the zest out of it for Hugh."

John was too stunned for a moment at that word "fiancée" to more than murmur:

"Oh—I did not know—yes, that was too bad."

Peyton added, as if by afterthought:

"I suppose I am committing no breach of confidence. There has been no announcement yet—the affair has only taken definite shape within the last few days. I was sure you would be interested, and at best it cannot be long until the world knows, though I suppose it is hardly necessary to ask you not to speak of it until the announcement. I am sure my sister would like to have you know, since you have shown some interest in both her and Mr. Kent and it is not a matter she could very well mention herself."

"No, certainly not—I understand. Mr. Kent is to be greatly congratulated," said John in a voice that rather surprised Peyton by its firmness.

During Peyton's last speech John had decided that he would still make that opportunity he had so longed for a few moments before. He would put Margaret to the proof, and if she was engaged to Hugh she would have to tell him so. He had been too dazed to think for the first few wretched moments, and it had seemed to him not incompatible with what he knew of such things that into an engagement of long standing should come a new and more vivid interest, that for the time eclipsed the old one. But when Peyton had added that the engagement was a new one, made, probably, since his acquaintance with Margaret had begun, he said swiftly to himself—"He lies! he lies!" And he did Peyton the injustice of believing that he had fabricated the story out of whole cloth to unscrupulously accomplish purposes of his own.

In a flash, every incident of his acquaintance with Margaret was vividly before him, and it was impossible to reconcile the events of that long night session, the unmistakable tokens she had given of a deep interest in him; and still more impossible to reconcile the sweet daring of her wooing of him in the woods a short hour before, with any idea of a newly engaged woman. Either Peyton was lying, or Margaret was an unimaginably black-hearted coquette. Of these two alternatives, it was possible for him only to take the first, and hence the cheerfulness of his reply which astonished Peyton.

Yet, when, a little after two o'clock of the same afternoon he found himself crossing the Kentwick meadows by a little footpath which Hugh had pointed out to him as the short cut to Beauvoir, he was not so supremely confident as he had been when he made that answer to Peyton. A black suspicion cannot be introduced into the heart without leaving its trail, and often and firmly as it may be downed, it will, at unguarded moments, lift its baleful head. What did John know of women? Had he not often read of just such wiles, and was not reading the extent of his knowledge of them? More, what did he know of Margaret? Was an acquaintance of a week long enough to warrant him in being willing to stake his life on her truth? But at that question the black suspicion took ignominious flight, for John's head lifted, and his eyes flashed, and his whole soul answered "Yes!"

The day had been one of intense heat and sultriness.

All the morning the sun had been obscured by indistinct clouds of vapor through which could be dimly seen the outlines of towering thunder-heads. But as John glanced up at the sky now he saw that the steaming, seething mists of the morning had gathered themselves up into definite form, and from the southwest was rapidly advancing a black storm-cloud—its torn and ragged edges showing the violence of the wind it held within its bosom.

John knew well the signs of these storms of semi-tropical violence that in this section of country often broke with such devastating fury, and he knew this threatened to be one of the worst. He quickened his steps, but the storm was swifter than he. A black pall had overspread the sky now, only at its western edge lifting a little to let a sickly, greenish light through, more terrifying than darkness. The clouds had taken on a whirling motion and began to form the dreaded funnel. There was no disgrace in flight from such a storm. John broke into a run, dashed into the red gravel drive, ran swiftly across the lawn, sprang up the verandah steps at a bound and waiting for no formalities of bell-ringing, flung open the door and closed it behind him just as the fury of the storm broke.

He turned from securely fastening the door to see Margaret coming down the steps looking like some swiftly gliding wraith, so colorless was she in this dim light, and her eyes wide with terror. She ran to him with hands outstretched, and with a great cry of mingled relief and fear:

"Oh, Mr. Dalton! I am so glad! I am all alone in the house and I am so afraid!"

He took her hands and held them firmly hoping to reassure her by the strength of his touch, but his practical mind took in at once the exigencies of the emergency. An open window might mean the house torn to splinters, while a firmly closed front might be able to withstand the onslaughts of the wind, which was now roaring around them, striking against the house with the effect of the swift and repeated strokes of a great battering ram.

"All alone! he shouted for only so could he make himself heard. "Are the windows all down? And where is everybody?"

Margaret shouted back

"I had just been all over the house and closed them as you came. The servants are in their cabins, I suppose. Tia Elisa is spending the day at Elmhurst, and I don't know where Peyton is."

Her voice broke on the last words in a half sob, for her anxiety for Peyton, out somewhere in the storm she feared, had contributed most to her terror.

John only held her hands a little the more firmly, and they stood looking out at the storm without trying to talk. The words John longed to say, with a desire that was almost uncontrollable, were not words to be shouted aloud at such a moment. Margaret, clinging to his hands with an ineffable sense of comfort and security in their strong grasp, glanced up at him once or twice and saw his face set sternly in the effort at self restraint, though

always as he felt her glance, he looked down at her with the smile he would have bestowed on the little Peggy of old, and which had twice before stirred vague memories for her.

She had need of the reassurance of his smile and of the clasp of his hand, for the storm, momentarily growing in violence, was now playing mad havoc with the beloved Beauvoir trees. They had been tossing their branches and beating the ground under the lash of the wind, but now there was a wilder burst of fury; the tops of venerable oaks and lindens snapped with the report of cannon and great branches were wrenched off with a fearful sound of tearing and grinding. To increase the horror of the storm, the rain began to fall in driving sheets, and to the crash of falling trees and the roar of the wind were added the continuous and blinding flashes of lightning and the deafening reports and roll of thunder, peal upon peal, just above their heads.

John's soul loved the wild roar of the wind and the rain and except for Margaret's terror and that he knew there was a real danger that the house might not withstand the repeated shocks of the wind, he would have revelled in the mighty battle of the gods. There came a moment when in one blinding flash and deafening roar, the whole universe seemed to be crashing down upon their heads, and even Dalton thought the house was going, it so trembled and rocked beneath them. Margaret, while with one hand she but held tighter to John, with her other covered her eyes to shut out the blinding glare and the awful havoc the onslaught of the wind was mak-

ing among the trees. It was the crest of the storm, and its violence probably only lasted a few seconds, though to Margaret, shivering with terror, it seemed a long time before she heard John's cheery tones: "I think the worst is over, Miss Le Beau." And certainly the next wave of wind that dashed against the house was not so violent and in a few moments the crash of falling limbs had ceased, the flashes of lightning were less blinding, the thunder began to be only a distant and majestic roll and the rain was no longer driving in solid walls, blotting out the world.

John drew Margaret to the window to watch the retreating banners of the storm: clouds rent into long streamers scudding across the sky, and through the rifts the sun at intervals breaking forth. The lawn was a scene of devastation, piled high with fallen trees and branches, but even here there was something to cheer Margaret. Not so many of the trees were gone as she had feared; most of the stateliest were still left, marred of their perfect beauty, but with wounds that another summer's releafing would cover, and the younger ones had saved themselves by bending to the storm and would in time take the place of the grand old monarchs laid low.

There was no longer any necessity for holding Margaret's hand—the danger and the terror were over—and yet Margaret did not withdraw it, and certainly John could not, without discourtesy he thought, voluntarily relinquish it. There could be no better moment to carry out his determination formed in the early dawn—

which Peyton had for a moment weakened but which he had quickly retaken—and he drew himself together to make the plunge.

He was going to tell Margaret first what he had once said would depend upon his nomination whether he ever told her. He was going to tell her, that meeting her at Mrs. Paxton's tea had given him so much pleasure because he remembered so well the little Peggy and her valorous defence of him. After that he was going to tell her about that hour in the early dawn when he had first fully recognized his love for her, and tell her with what awe he had learned that she had heard in sleep the longing cry of his soul for her. He was going to make her listen to him in silence. She should hear it all without a chance to give him one word of encouragement or to stop him if she desired; for at the last he was going to say to her: "This is the end; my brief dream is over. Your brother has told me of your engagement to Mr. Kent. I knew it was but madness—what have I to do with love—but I shall go away and some day I will be sane again!" And if there was in his heart a lurking hope that she would repudiate the engagement and that she would not let it be the end, he would not recognize it.

Making desperate summons of all his courage and unconsciously taking a firmer grasp of Margaret's hand while he looked down on her with unsmiling eyes, he made his bold beginning.

"Miss Le Beau, I have changed my mind—I am going to tell you the second way in which you gave me pleasure at Mrs. Paxton's tea."

Margaret would have been a strange woman if she had not recognized the electric disturbance with which the mental atmosphere was charged, even without that quick pressure of her hand. So swiftly had the tornado passed that already there were only low mutterings of distant thunder and the sun was brightly shining on the ruins left in its path. But the storm center had only shifted, Margaret knew, to Dalton's soul and hers, and deliberately as she had tried to bring this moment, she could not keep her hand from trembling in his, nor her face from paling, as she looked up at him and murmured scarcely above her breath:

"I am so glad."

John, looking down into her eyes and reading there what lifted his soul to the seventh heaven, was in a moment dashed pitilessly to the earth again. There was a quick step on the verandah, a figure flashed by the window, not so swiftly but that it half stopped and took in the picture framed there, and then a furious rattling of the door knob.

John, remembering that he had locked the door for security against the storm, flushed as he recognized how it would look to Peyton to find the door that always stood open, barred against him. He dropped Margaret's hand and hastened to draw back the bolt and open the door, standing courteously aside to give Peyton entrance, with heightened color but with lifted head and shoulders squared, as a brave man should to meet the inevitable storm.

Peyton was in a towering passion and there was no

mistaking the signs of it. Margaret had run towards him with a delighted cry, for her anxiety about him had been great and her sudden relief at seeing him safe, unhurt by the storm, was as great and swallowed up for the moment, all thought of the inopportuneness of his appearance. But Peyton flung her from him so roughly that she staggered and might have fallen but for John's swiftly outstretched hand. She was white to the lips, and in her eyes was the look of a child in terror. Never in his life had Peyton been rough with her. His love for her had been near to adoration and as tender in its expression as the love of a mother. That he should, for no reason that she knew, be so brutal to her, and in the presence of Dalton, dazed her and she sank into the chair to which John led her shivering and cowering and with the feeling that the world was coming to an end.

John stood beside her, his arm thrown over the tall back of her chair, and his attitude, which looked, as he intended it should, like one of protection, drove Peyton to greater fury.

"Take your arm off that chair!" he shouted. "Go away from my sister! How dare you come interfering here after what I told you this morning!"

If there is ever an excuse for such bursts of uncontrollable passion, there was some little excuse for Peyton. A temper inherited from generations of fire-eaters, usually kept under perfect control and but seldom indeed, in the conditions of modern life aroused, had suddenly burst all bounds. There was generous wrath in it toward his sister, that she should have been guilty of such

disloyalty to Hugh—for he firmly believed in the engagement—and there was towering rage towards the man who, he believed willfully and knowingly, had led her into such betrayal—such dishonor to the blood of the Le Beaus.

The picture framed in the window—Dalton holding Margaret's hand and looking down into her eyes looking up at him—aroused him to a fury which became ungovernable madness when he discovered the locked door. Dalton's coolness, so far from soothing him only wrought his frenzy higher, and but for Margaret's presence he would probably have proceeded to personal violence.

Dalton, erect by Margaret's chair, paid no heed to Peyton's furious orders. His grey eyes looking coolly into Peyton's frenzied ones, he was inwardly boiling with indignation. For a moment he wished the old code was in force. He could understand how men could want to settle a quarrel of this kind by the duel—though heretofore it had seemed to him the most senseless as well as the most barbarous of customs. Since that was impossible, there was nothing John was so greatly desiring at this moment, as the absence of Margaret, which would permit him to give Peyton the thrashing he deserved. He did not doubt that he could do it, for though Peyton was as tall as he, John was broader of shoulder and he felt at that moment the strength of a giant in his good right arm tingling to avenge on Peyton the indignity to his sister. His indignation was for Margaret. He cared little for what Peyton had said to him,

he had always recognized the hostility of his attitude toward him from the day when he had first seen his horse's ears pricking over the Osage hedge—but that he should treat Margaret with such brutality made him rage at the banality of a situation which would not permit him to fight Margaret's brother in Margaret's behalf.

There was a moment of silence while the two men glared at each other, John holding himself quiet by strong restraint, determined for Margaret's sake to say nothing that should add fury to the flame, Peyton gathering himself together for a new burst of wrath. Margaret had been at first like some dumb animal who shrinks from the blow of a hand that has never before been raised but in caresses. But at Peyton's words to Dalton the blood flowed swiftly back from her heart and beat strongly through her veins. The returning tide brought her to her feet and her eyes flashed as imperiously as Peyton's though without their madness.

"Peyton, how dare you!" she exclaimed, and John could hardly believe the ringing tones were not the little Peggy's. History had curiously repeated itself and for the moment his vision swam and they three were again at the red gravel entrance to Beauvoir, the child in her little cart, the man on his horse and John in the dusty garb of a tramp.

"How dare you!" she cried. "Mr. Dalton is my friend and neither he nor I deserve such treatment from you."

Then a sudden wave of mingled love and pity for her

brother seemed to sweep over her and just as years before she had turned to John with her stately little apology for Peyton, she turned to him again.

"Mr. Dalton," she said—and now she could not keep her chin from quivering piteously and the quick tears from springing to her eyes—"You must excuse my brother. I do not know what he means by speaking to you so, and oh, I hope you will believe he has never been like this before; he has always been the best of brothers."

Her voice broke on the last word. The quivering chin, the breaking voice were more than Peyton could stand. He adored his sister and his anger toward her had lasted but for a moment. Let her be right or wrong, she was still his idolized Margaret, and his love for her at sight of her distress rushed tumultuously back again, mingled with a keen remorse for his treatment of her.

"Margaret," he exclaimed in agonized entreaty, "forgive me!"

Margaret turned and looked at him. His arms were out-stretched toward her—in a flash all was forgiven and forgotten. Nothing remained in her heart but a great joy that her brother had come to himself again. With a divine smile of forgiveness, and with a murmured, "Oh, Peyton!" expressing all her anguish and all her joy, she fled to his arms and for a brief moment, her head upon his shoulder gave way to uncontrollable tears.

John, standing aloof and watching the reconciliation of brother and sister, felt the keenest pain of his life. Margaret had forgotten him! What was this new love

if there was any in her heart for him, compared with the old traditions, the tender affection of a lifetime!

He had never known the love of either brother or sister. He venerated the memory of a sturdy farmer father whose unbending honesty of purpose and uprightness of life were the principal legacies he had bequeathed his son, and he had tenderly loved his frail and gentle mother whose ambitions for her boy had been his inspiration, but they were but memories, and at this lonely moment it seemed to him, there could be nothing in life quite so satisfying as the love and companionship of such a sister as Margaret was to Peyton. He had been afraid to leave her alone with her brother when that brother had seemed a raving maniac; he need fear no longer, and he would go. They were sufficient for each other, and he was outside the pale of even their thoughts at such a moment as this.

It was only for an instant that Margaret's head was buried on Peyton's shoulder; she lifted it again quickly and turned to Dalton with a wistful smile that seemed to ask his forgiveness for making a "scene" while it timidly included him in the reconciliation with her brother.

But if either she or John supposed that Peyton's plea for forgiveness had meant to include also forgiveness for his treatment of Dalton, they were both quickly undeceived. Peyton lifted his head as Margaret lifted hers and bent upon Dalton a glance imperiously and relentlessly hostile. John did not hesitate a moment. A pride as towering as Peyton's and almost as relentlessly

hostile flashed for a moment from his eyes to Peyton's and then he walked deliberately across to a table where his hat lay, picked it up and turned to Margaret with an extended hand.

"Miss Le Beau," he said, "I must thank you for all your goodness to me. I am not ungrateful, and if I am saying now farewell and not 'auf wiedersehen' it is through no fault of mine."

He held her hand the fraction of a second, and looked straight down into her eyes, coolly oblivious of Peyton, his glance saying a thousand things his lips might not utter. Perhaps in that brief waiting he was hoping Margaret would bid him return, or at least utter the "Auf weidersehen" that he could not. But she only looked at him with strangely startled eyes as if she could not at once take in the meaning of his words.

He seemed for a moment about to say something more but thought better of it, dropped her hand hastily, and without looking toward Peyton passed quickly through the door and out into the world of ruin and devastation the great storm at Beauvoir had left in its track, and that seemed to him but the faint counterpart of the ruined ambitions, the shattered hopes that at this moment blackened all the future for him.

CHAPTER XXII.

MARGARET TEARS A NOTE TO PIECES.

It was characteristic of John, as perhaps it is of all strong natures, to sink to the lowest depths under any overwhelming sorrow or disappointment. Not until he had explored every subterranean channel of woe, tasted the full bitterness of sorrow and defeat, could he rise once more to the surface of life mentally and spiritually purified, calm and strong again to renew the battle.

As long as he was in sight of the Beauvoir windows he held his head high and his shoulders squared, while he dragged great branches out of his path or climbed over the trunks of mighty trees making a slow and laborious progress. But where the spreading oak stood sentinel at the entrance to Beauvoir was quite out of range, and there he stopped and leaned against its sturdy trunk, untouched by the storm that had raged around it, and for a long hour with bowed head and folded arms he let the whole sea of sorrow roll over him, wave after wave, billow after billow.

There seemed but little left in life for him to struggle for. He knew now as he would know twenty years hence, that no other woman could enter his life as Margaret had done. He fully believed that he had been unconsciously waiting for her all these years, only to have her snatched from him at the very moment that she was ready to surrender herself to him; for so he had interpreted her murmured "I am so glad," and the wonder-

ful light in her eyes lifted to his.

Not for a moment did he believe she was engaged to Hugh. This last scene with Peyton only made him the more ready to believe him capable of a lie to compass his own ends, and made it also the more impossible to doubt Margaret's sincerity. None the less it was all over. A beautiful vision had entered his life and for a few days glorified it beyond the dreams of Paradise; but it was only a vision, and for him the dream of Paradise was ended. Her brother would never for a moment tolerate a man of the people—John had unerringly placed his finger on the root of Peyton's hostility—and Margaret was not a woman to defy her brother whose ardent love for his sister had been evident to Dalton through all the height of his fury against her, even if she were willing to sacrifice the traditions which John recognized had for both brother and sister a weight of authority beyond his comprehension. And with the bitterness of pride—unworthy, doubtless, but natural at a moment of such humiliation—he added to himself that nothing now, not Margaret herself, could ever induce him to renew a suit that had been so scornfully rejected by Margaret's brother. Like a sweet morsel under his tongue, also, he rolled the old bitterness of his political defeats. It was all of a piece—he was nothing now but a shattered wreck of less use in the world than these wrecks of the storm that lay all about him and made Le Beau Way look like a long impassable avenue of ruin.

Yet along this impassable avenue there was coming at this moment, making slow but steady progress, a horse

and its rider. Sometimes the horse trampled the torn branches beneath his feet, sometimes he picked his way carefully around them, sometimes he boldly leaped a fallen trunk and sometimes the rider was compelled to dismount and clear the path for him. When John first heard the crackling of branches he had been so deeply submerged by those billows of woe that the sound had fallen on unheeding ears. But with the irrepressible buoyancy of his nature, he was beginning to get his head above the waves and discern a faint gleam of light piercing the black pall of the future, and the light had come to him with the thought that there was still some work for him to do. There was still enough of his old influence with the party remaining from the wreck to make him a power to be counted with and he had left it an open question with himself whether that power should be used for Berkeley or not. He knew that without doubt that question was at this very moment giving the party leaders some bad quarters of an hour and a grim smile lifted the drooping corners of his mouth and a tiny twinkle sparkled in his gloomy eyes at the thought.

It was then that he became conscious of the sound of breaking branches and knew that he had been hearing them for some time, and looking up espied Hugh on Selim's back not far away making a painful progress toward him. John hoped and believed that he had not himself been discovered in his attitude of dejection and it was with an air of most buoyant cheer that he waved his hat and shouted a stentorian greeting to Hugh as he plunged into the sea of leafage and advanced towards

him.

He made better progress on foot than Hugh could possibly make on his horse, and Hugh's first words were an apology for having brought Selim.

"It was not nearly so bad a storm up at Kent Hall," he said, "or I should have known it was much wiser to try it afoot." And then he added—"It was necessary for someone to come. We tried to get Beauvoir by telephone but the wires are down. Is everything all right at the house? No one hurt?"

"Everybody all right" answered John, recognizing the anxiety in Hugh's tones, "or at least, Mr. Le Beau and his sister are. Miss Elisa was not at home, she was spending the day at Elmhurst, I think they said."

"That's good," said Hugh simply, and then produced a blue and white envelope which he handed to John.

"This came," he said, "just as the storm broke. I had to wait until it was over, of course, before starting to bring it to you, and I have been all this time since getting here."

"Oh," said John, "too bad you should have taken such trouble—I've no doubt it could easily have waited. But it was very good of you."

"Not at all. I was anxious about the Beauvoir people and should have come over even if there had been no telegram to bring, since I could not get them by phone."

And John, who was quite convinced of the truth of this statement, expressed no more regrets, but tore open his telegram.

Hugh, noting the deep lines between his eyes as he

read and his grave face said with respectful anxiety: "No bad news, sir, I hope?"

"By no means," answered John, looking up with an alertness of expression that Hugh had not seen in his face since that all night session of the convention, "It's from the Chairman of the National Committee. He asks me to meet the committee in New York on Thursday and I was hesitating for a moment whether to say yes or no, but I've decided it shall be yes. That is," he added, "if I can get into the city in time for a night train. This is Tuesday and I can only just make it."

Two hours before it would have taken John longer to decide. He was quite willing to keep the party leaders on tenterhooks for awhile, and it was soothing to his wounded vanity to see that they were fully as anxious about his future course as he had thought they would be. Two hours before, therefore, he might have made further concessions to what he would have called his dignity, by holding off and waiting for a more peremptory summons. But now here was the very excuse he wanted to get away at once. It looked to him like a kindly interposition of the fates or, as he would probably have put it—for he was innately religious—a direct leading of Providence. He would be worse than foolish to refuse this opening. Moreover the telegram had brought the smell of gunpowder to his nostrils and he was at once keen for the battle field; a keenness that showed in the alertness and decision of every movement. His hour of depression was over—the time for action had arrived, and his spirits rose to meet it.

Hugh, who was genuinely disappointed that Dalton's visit should be cut so short, and expressed his disappointment earnestly, soon caught the contagion of his energy and instead of going on to Beauvoir as he had intended, turned back at once with John to make every arrangement that would facilitate his catching the six o'clock train to the city.

Margaret's eyes followed Dalton as he walked across the room, opened the door and closed it behind him. It was a long look, that remained fixed on the closed door even when his step no longer sounded on the verandah; and still lingered when the crackling of branches, as he cleared a path for himself, had quite ceased. It was a look that struck terror to Peyton's soul. Was it possible that his sister was more deeply interested in Dalton than he had for a moment supposed?

She had drawn herself aloof from him when she discovered that his aspect was still hostile to Dalton, and now, as she slowly withdrew her fixed gaze from the door through which John had vanished, she turned without glancing at Peyton, and began as slowly to mount the stairs.

"Margaret! Margaret! do not leave me so," Peyton called to her, as, her foot on the first stair, he saw that she was really leaving him without a word.

Margaret put her next foot on the second stair without apparently hearing him, and he called her again more importunately:

"Come back, Margaret! Come back, little sister! Come and let us talk it over!"

Then Margaret turned, but there was no yielding in her face or voice.

"I have nothing to say to you," she said coldly, "and I do not suppose you are ready to say to me the only thing I am willing to hear."

"Margaret," he exclaimed, passionately, advancing to the foot of the stair-case and looking up at her where she stood two steps above him, "is it possible that you can care so much for that fellow that you will let him come between you and me?"

"The impossible has been proved possible several times in the last few moments." Margaret still spoke icily and as if she were discussing a question entirely indifferent to her. "I had never supposed it possible that my brother could have used violence towards me; still less could I have supposed it possible that Peyton Le Beau, in his own house, could have insulted and outraged a guest of the house and his sister's friend."

By this time Peyton had possessed himself of her hand which lay limp in his with no return of his eager pressure.

"Come down, Margaret," he implored, "and let us talk it over. Oh it is all wretched, and there was no excuse for my ungentlemanly passion, but I think I have had some provocation too. Will you come and talk it over?"

Still Margaret hesitated for a moment. But beneath the iciness of her exterior she was ardently longing for Peyton to be able to clear himself, or rather, since that

was impossible, longing that he should come into a frame of mind willing to make the apologies to Dalton necessary if there was to be any continuance of her friendship with him.

She yielded finally, therefore, and let him lead her down the steps to their old cosy corner between the west and south windows, where as long ago as she could remember, every important conference of her life with Peyton had taken place. Scoldings, advice, confidences had all been bestowed in that deep and comfortable corner divan, just big enough for two. The spot had so many memories thronging about it that the very atmosphere enveloping it was impregnated with her childhood, her girlhood, her young womanhood, and all of it with Peyton, her more than brother, her hardly less than father.

The very selection of this sacred spot had given Peyton a position of advantage that he was quick to make the most of and that Margaret felt that she must stiffen herself against.

"Do you remember, Margaret," he began, and was going on to recall some of the tender associations of the spot—but Margaret stopped him:

"I'm not here to recall the past, Peyton, I thought you had something of importance to say to me."

Much as Peyton adored his sister, there had been moments in his life when he also stood in awe of her, but never so greatly as at this moment. He hardly recognized in this coldly dispassionate woman his impulsive and warm-hearted Margaret. For a moment he had the

curious sensation that in some mysterious fashion they had exchanged personalities; Margaret was his own cynical self in woman-form and he was the tender and appealing Margaret. He hesitated a moment, but he quickly decided it was better to give up the *appeal ad hominem* he had intended and go at once to the root of the matter:

"I have something of importance to say, Margaret. Without doubt you think I had no right to speak to Mr. Dalton as I did; certainly there is no excuse for my rough treatment of you. But will you for a moment consider my feelings as I ran by that window and saw that man holding my sister's hand and looking adoringly at her, and *she—permitting—it*? And then, of course, finding the door locked made it just so much worse."

He waited for Margaret to reply, and she began calmly enough:

"The locked door was perfectly natural—it was barred to secure it from the wind and neither of us remembered to unlock it." But she went on with more effort, and there was a little vibration in her low tones and a slowly mounting color in her pale cheeks, that betrayed her deep feeling:

"I know of no reason, Peyton, why Mr. Dalton should not have been doing all that you say he was doing—if I chose to permit it."

"Margaret! What of Hugh!"

There was shocked indignation in Peyton's tones, and Margaret, recognizing it, grew cool again.

"I do not see what Hugh has to do with it."

"Are you not engaged to him?" the rising inflection of Peyton's voice expressed his wonder and bewilderment, a doubt as to this engagement beginning at last to penetrate his mind.

"Certainly not!"

"I do not understand you, Margaret," said Peyton, for the first time speaking as coldly as she had spoken. "I did not suppose the tender scene I interrupted in the library at Devonshire Place could be accounted for on any other hypothesis."

It was a full minute before Margaret replied, and Peyton waited, almost as indignant with her as he had been when he first entered the room, watching her sitting absolutely motionless, her eyes on her hands lying quietly in her lap. She was very angry with Peyton, but it had come to her in a flash how easily that interview with Hugh might have been misunderstood by one coming in on it as Peyton had done, and how shocking all her interest in Dalton and her encouragement of him must have seemed to her high-minded brother in the light of his belief in the engagement. She could not endure that he should think so meanly of her and she resolved to be very explicit that there might be no more misunderstandings. But it was not easy for her to talk of such intimate matters, even with Peyton, and especially did she shrink from what seemed to her like the betrayal of a sacred confidence in speaking of Hugh and his disappointment. It was with great effort that she began, therefore, and her tones were much gentler and

sweeter than they had been so far:

"You interrupted no tender scene, Peyton, and Hugh and I are not engaged. Hugh knows that there is no possibility that we will ever be and he would be as sorry as I am if he knew that you had made such a mistake."

Peyton looked at her dumbfounded. His belief in the engagement had been so entire he could not lightly resign it. Moreover he was of that persistent nature that must probe a matter to the quick.

"But Margaret," he remonstrated, "did you not tell me that you were going to give Hugh a trial this summer?"

"Yes," said Margaret, and now the color began to deepen in her cheeks and her hands trembled a little while she kept her eyes still downcast, "and I did try, but—I found it was not possible—I do not believe you can force such things, Peyton."

"There," said Peyton quickly, touched by the signs of her distress, "I'll not pry into your affairs any further, Margaret. I'm sorry; my heart was quite set on you and Hugh making a go of it, but of course if you can't, it's all right."

Then a sudden thought struck him.

"What a fool I was!" he exclaimed sharply.

Margaret looked up at him quickly, and in a flash of intuition she understood Peyton's words to Dalton—"How dare you come interfering here after what I told you this morning."

"Did you tell Mr. Dalton I was engaged to Hugh?" she asked quietly. But Peyton was not deceived—there

was the ring of steel under the velvet of her tones. The light bronze of his cheek slowly deepened to dull red. "Forgive me, Margaret," he entreated humbly. "What a meddling Miss Nancy you must think me! I will make any amends you want me to. I will write him a note and tell him it was all a mistake and that I was an officious ass."

"And will you also apologize for your insult to him?"

Margaret was still implacable. It seemed to her intolerable that Dalton should be led to believe her that despicable creature who could trifle with one man while engaged to another. Nor did it comfort her that his manner to her during and after the storm was not the manner of a man towards a woman whom he believed capable of such falseness. Instead, she shudderingly thought that this hideous mistake probably accounted for the change towards her which she had attributed to sensitiveness over his defeat, and she winced as at the touch of raw flesh as she remembered her wooing of him in the woods and how he must have regarded it.

"Margaret," said Peyton humbly, "I will do everything you want me to do. I will make the fullest apology I know how to make, only, Margaret, do not treat me so coldly. Do not let Dalton come between me and your love."

Then he seized her hand and held it close.

"Margaret, look at me!" he said passionately—for through this last speech she had sat impassive her eyes again upon her hands lying quietly in her lap, and he felt as if he were talking to a woman of stone. "Mar-

garet," he implored, "we have been so happy together. Only promise me that you will have nothing more to do with that man and we will be so happy again."

"That is hardly necessary," said Margaret coldly, looking up at him as she spoke with no yielding in her glance. "You have effectually destroyed any desire on Mr. Dalton's part to have anything more to do with me, I should fancy."

Peyton buried his face in his hands and groaned, and then at last Margaret relented. She took hold of his hands and drew them away from his face and held them warmly clasped in hers while she said very sweetly:

"Only write that note, Peyton, and get it to him as quickly as possible, and I will try not to make you unhappy any more."

But after all, though Peyton went to his desk at once and wrote a note that he handed to Margaret to read and which was all she could ask in the way of apology and of setting Dalton right as to her engagement, he did not get it to him as quickly as he had intended.

Gaston was nowhere to be found, and the note must be intrusted to old Caesar. But first Peyton's horse and Old Nell must be caught and saddled, for Peyton must fetch Tia Elisa home and no carriage could make a passage through the fallen trees and branches that obstructed Le Beau way; and much as Tia Elisa disliked to entrust herself to a horse's back there was no other possible way of bringing her home. And old Caesar was slow in his movements; and the storm had made both horses wild

and hard to catch, Old Nell particularly being kittenish as a young colt; and so by the time Peyton had started in one direction, leading Old Nell, and Caesar had started in the other, riding a long-eared mule and bearing the note firmly clutched in an extended hand, the afternoon was far spent.

Margaret did not know why she had been in such a fever of impatience at these repeated delays. Certainly there could be no reason for such mad haste as seemed to her imperative. A delay of a few hours could make no real difference—the note, she was sure, would be equally welcome earlier or later. She supposed it was only that she could not bear that Mr. Dalton should think so hardly of her brother. And then, in her heart, she knew that her eagerness to clear her brother was as nothing as compared with her intense desire that John should not remain for one unnecessary moment in the belief that she was engaged to Hugh and had been but playing the despicable part of a flirt. She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw Caesar at last ambling down the red gravel drive and knew that though this sable Mercury might be slow none could be more trustworthy.

As she watched him disappear down the steep turn into Le Beau Way she heard the whistle of the six o'clock train for the city, and at the sound she was oppressed by a vague sense of uneasiness. She said to herself it was a foolish fear for Dalton was not to leave Kent Hall for nearly a week, and he was not the man to cut short his visit to Hugh because of a quarrel with Peyton. But her uneasiness was not to be quieted, and when fifteen minutes

later she saw, through the wide windows of the living-room, Hugh riding up under the lindens and maples, she divined at once on what errand he had come.

The evening had turned cool after the storm, and she had lighted the fire, always ready laid in the great fireplace, thinking it would be a cheery greeting to Tia Elisa and would help dispel the dampness which might easily bring on her aunt's much dreaded rheumatism. The outer door stood wide open and at Hugh's tap on the screen door she bade him enter without rising from the comfortable low chair she had drawn up before the fire.

It seemed to her that Hugh was a long time in making his eager inquiries for their welfare during the storm and in drawing up a deep armed chair opposite her and making himself at ease in it, for she was sure through it all that this was only preliminary to an impending blow. When he clapped his hand on his pocket, she knew exactly what was to follow, and when he drew out Peyton's note to Dalton she had so far prepared herself for it that she extended her hand to receive it with the utmost outward calm.

"I met Cæsar," said Hugh, "on my way back from the station and took charge of Peyton's note. I hope it was nothing of importance. Mr. Dalton was called away by a telegram from the Chairman of the National Committee summoning him to a conference in New York. He sent his good-byes to his friends at Beauvoir, and particularly to Tia Elisa. He's as much in love with Tia Elisa as the rest of us. We're terribly cut up at our house by his

sudden departure—it has broken up our party."

"Yes, it was quite too bad," said Margaret quietly. "Did he really *have* to go? I should suppose an engagement with you would be as much an obligation as a summons from the party leaders."

"Oh, you can't count on public men, I suppose," said Hugh dolefully, "but it's a blow. I thought I was going to give him such a good time this week."

"Very likely a man like that wouldn't care for our good times; very likely they seem child's play to him and not to be considered for a moment when a call to politics comes."

There was the slightest shade of bitterness in Margaret's tones. Hugh was not particularly surprised at it—the women at Kent Hall had showed something of the same spirit at the announcement of Dalton's departure—or at least Julie had. He answered dubiously:

"Perhaps, but I thought he seemed to enjoy the possum hunt as much as any of us. No, I think he really had to go; though come to think of it, I believe he seemed in better spirits after receiving that telegram than he has seemed since the convention."

Margaret did not answer; she was playing with Peyton's note, turning it over and over and apparently considering some question quite remote from this topic of conversation. To Hugh's astonishment, he saw her, after a few moments of this deliberation, begin to tear the note into little bits and feed it to the flames. She became suddenly conscious of his look, and glanced up at him with a quick flush of embarrassment.

"I know the contents of Peyton's note, Hugh," she said apologetically, "and it's of no importance at all. Peyton will be quite willing that I should burn it."

Then she threw the last bit into the fire, shook a tiny scrap from her dress and looked up at Hugh with an entire change of manner.

"There, Hugh," she said lightly, "that's the last of Mr. Dalton! We've seen a great deal of him lately, but he has passed out of our lives now forever."

"You've burned him up, have you?" said Hugh, responding to her lightness. But in his heart he was wondering at Margaret. Dalton had aroused in him an ardent devotion as he aroused in most men who came closely in touch with him, but he had at times, also, been keenly jealous of him. He had suspected that it was Margaret's interest in Dalton that had been responsible for his own swift fall from the highest pinnacle of hope to the lowest depths of despair. Now Margaret had said it was all over with Dalton—did that mean there was any hope for him? Hugh knew he was a fool to let himself ever again, no matter what the provocation, feel any stirrings of hope, but none the less at her words there was a tiny flutter about his heart and a new light in his eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

YES OR NO?

It was as Hugh said: Dalton's sudden departure had created consternation at Kent Hall, and, as Hugh had not said, but thought, it had created also a little bitterness.

It was Julie who felt the bitterness and expressed it frankly, for Dalton's departure meant Seton's also.

"I don't see why you have to go just because Mr. Dalton goes," pouted Julie.

She and Seton were standing in one of the walks of the famous rose garden, and it was the most delightfully secluded spot in the world in which to say a sudden good-bye to a friend. Julie had asked him here ostensibly to see what havoc the storm had made with the rare old roses; really to say good-bye.

"Oh, but I could not let him go without me," Frank had replied quickly to her remonstrance, "especially on such a summons as this. Why, I have always gone with him, to every convention and to every council."

"Will they let you be present at the council?" asked Julie skeptically.

"No, I suppose not," answered Frank. "But then I will be on hand to talk it over and give him encouragement if he needs it."

"But Mr. Dalton is not a baby, and you are not a nurse," she insisted petulantly.

Frank laughed boyishly.

"I reckon if there's any baby in the question, it's not Dalton," he declared loyally; and then added half wistfully:

"But you know, Miss Delauney, we've always been together since we were boys—and—and—we like it."

"Oh well, of course, if you prefer taking that tiresome trip to New York, rather than stay at Kent Hall with our party, there's nothing more to be said."

Julie's tone betrayed her pique—intentionally, perhaps, and Frank hastened to say deprecatingly:

"But I don't prefer it, Miss Delauney, I am greatly disappointed to have to leave Kent Hall so unexpectedly and before my visit is finished. But it does not seem to me that it would be quite right to desert Mr. Dalton now. I have no doubt this will be a crucial occasion."

Julie laughed a mocking laugh. Frank reddened, and with an unwonted show of spirit, for him, he said stiffly:

"You are amused, Miss Delauney, will you be good enough to tell me why?"

Julie laughed again, and then she said half scornfully:

"Oh, I was only thinking what a good thing it is that neither you nor Mr. Dalton are marrying men. What would become of your poor wives if you two took a notion you wanted to go off somewhere together. You wouldn't stop to consider them for a moment."

This speech threw Frank into an agony of embarrassment, as no doubt Julie knew it would. To refer to him as a marrying man or not a marrying man, and worse, to speak of his possible wife, sent waves of crimson rushing

to his very ear-tips. He shuffled uneasily from one foot to the other, looked longingly at the distant house, when he dared to lift his eyes from the ground, and if he could have summoned the requisite courage, would no doubt have fled precipitately.

Julie relented.

"Mr. Seton," she said sweetly, "it is horrid of me to be so disagreeable just when you are leaving us. But I am really so disappointed, it makes me cross, and I'm no angel like Helen. Forgive me, please."

She looked at him shyly and still half pouting, like a naughty child trying to be good.

"Miss Delauney," stammered Frank, with a sudden rush of courage, "you *are* an angel, and—and—I hope you will not think I am not a marrying man. Only—I never until now found the right one."

And then his courage ebbed as swiftly as it had risen. He heard Dalton calling for him.

"I must go, Miss Delauney," he faltered hurriedly, and extending his hand for good-bye—"But will you let me write you?"

Julie put her hand in his and looked up at him so bewitchingly, so temptingly, that Frank entirely lost his head. Hardly knowing what he was doing, he threw his arm around her, gave her a hasty but determined kiss, and then literally ran for the house, not once looking back.

To do Julie justice, this was more than she had bargained for. She might be a little flirt, but it was never in her scheme of flirtation to allow matters to go so far

as a kiss. And that Seton of all men, professed woman-hater, but actually holding all women in great awe and reverence, as she had easily discovered, should have dared to be so bold, astonished and confounded her. She followed him slowly to the house and when, a half hour later, it was necessary to make her appearance to say good-bye to the two departing guests, she betrayed almost as much confusion as Seton, towards whom she hardly glanced.

But she recovered her wits sufficiently when in giving him her hand in farewell she felt him leave a scrap of paper within it, to conceal the tiny note until she could find a good excuse for going to her room where she could read it undisturbed.

"The dear old goose! if that isn't too like him!" she murmured, half tender, half amused, as she read Frank's words:

"Forgive me. I couldn't help it. Will you be my wife? Wire yes or no to train No. 10 Pennsylvania R. R. at Columbus."

Her first impulse was a little thrill of triumph. She had succeeded in landing this difficult fish, as gamey as a salmon, but it was a closed episode, she would wire nothing; her second, that this would hardly be treating him with the courtesy he deserved, she would wire "no." And then she fell to musing.

"Why should it not be "Yes" instead? He was really very desirable. She had been a poor girl all her life, holding her place in society because of her family—of the old French blood on which the city prided itself—and

still more, perhaps, because of her social talents; for she knew well if she had not made herself a desirable dinner guest from a pretty little talent she had for lively dinner chatter, society would long ago have forgotten all about her family; since she could very seldom indeed return the dinners and never with the state and ceremony of those where she was so often a welcome guest.

Moreover, to be always daintily dressed, what pinching economies had she not known! What days of tiresome sewing and cutting and planning! And then the humiliations she had had to submit to in accepting the cast-off garments of her friends, carelessly offered, and which she must spend days in remodelling so that they might be thoroughly disguised. She had often taken pleasure in the skill with which she had accomplished all this, making her little income go a long way and evolving such visions in dress as were the admiration and envy of her richer friends, but now it sent a thrill through her that she had only to wire yes and the days of small economies were over forever.

And then Julie's better nature stirred through her musings. For she had a better nature and some womanly little principles with which some of her friends would hardly have credited her. This flirtation with Seton had been carelessly entered into; it had amused her to see her power with the man who notoriously avoided women. But in her week's acquaintance she had been discovering in him some qualities that commanded her involuntary admiration, and it added greatly to the shock she had felt at his bold kiss that it was so at variance with the ideal

she had been unconsciously forming of him. Now she thought she understood his note; he had been betrayed into that kiss (she knew she had done her best to tempt him) and he was going to make the *amende honorable.* Well, it was the act of a *preux chevalier,* but she was not going to let him make such a sacrifice of himself for a superfine sense of honor.

And then a curious thing happened. She sat down to her desk to write the telegram with its simple message "No," when suddenly she felt once more his strong arms around her and his kiss on her lips, and instead of the anger she had felt in the rose garden her pulses were throbbing and her cheeks were glowing with a far different sensation.

She laid down her pen and buried her hot face in her hands for a moment. When she lifted her head her eyes were shining.

"Oh well," she murmured, "it will be to-morrow night before he reaches Columbus—the telegram can wait."

CHAPTER XXIV.

GOD BLESS PEGGY!

It was an interminable day to Dalton rolling steadily over the boundless prairies of Indiana and Illinois; miles of tasselled corn standing motionless in the breathless midsummer air; farm houses with their outbuildings flashing by only to be succeeded by more miles of the shining scimitars of cool green corn.

Seton had been in a state of excitement very unusual with him. Dalton did not know what caused it, but neither did he trouble himself to wonder at it much; his own thoughts were too engrossing. If he thought of it at all he was rather glad of it, for Seton's excitement found vent in ways that left Dalton quite undisturbed. First, he wrote to some one (Dalton almost thought he could guess to whom), a letter of prodigious length. The rest of the day he spent in striding up and down the library car, where they were sitting, with shining eyes and smoking as if his life depended upon the number of cigars he could get through with during the day; or in loud and excited discussions with the other men in the car.

Dalton himself was, of course, well known, and equally, of course, every man in the car was eager to have a little talk with him on the political situation. He had been complaisant at first, but finding that his whole day was likely to be absorbed in this fashion, he excused himself finally and asked Frank to excuse him to all newcomers by saying he had some problems to work out and he

would have to ask to be undisturbed for a while.

He knew they would take it for granted that these were political problems; and some of them were. But it did not take him long to dispose of these. He was quite sure he was being summoned to secure his active services for the campaign and to help outline a plan of action. He knew, too, why the leaders were in such a hurry. The convention was hardly closed and a little breathing space might have been expected before beginning the arduous work of the campaign. But the party papers in Dalton's section of the country were already full of the mutterings of discontent with the party nominee and threats, not always covert, of bolting to the other party or of forming a new one with Dalton as their leader.

Dalton himself was little moved by these mutterings of a distant storm; he was quite sure it would blow over, and he would have liked the week of absolute rest from politics that a visit at Kent Hall had promised him. If it had not been for the sudden and severe strain in his relations with Peyton (and he was not sure but with Margaret also), he would have wired the Chairman that he needed rest and could not come. He would much rather not have gone; he had not fully decided upon his line of action, and his faculties were still somewhat benumbed from the effects of over-work at the convention. There was only one thing that he was quite sure of—that he would *not* antagonize Berkeley; but whether he would agree to work for him, depended largely upon the attitude of the leaders towards him. He would have liked

also to feel himself mentally more fit, for no doubt Jim Burton would be of the council and he needed his faculties at their best to cope with Jim Burton.

Dalton had taken his seat in one of the comfortable revolving chairs at the rear of the car, where, with his back to the others, and his eyes on the endless miles of shining corn slipping by, he could give himself up to undisturbed meditation. It had not taken him long to dispose of his political problems, but he was still at sea as to what his course toward Margaret would be. Until the very moment of his leaving Kentwick he had not given up hope of receiving some word from her that would assure him that in spite of Peyton's quarrel with him she was herself unchanged. He had excused her silence when he said good-bye to her, for he knew that she must have been dazed by the whole dreadful scene, and before Peyton it would, perhaps, have been difficult to say what she desired. But no word had come, and now he was in doubt as to whether after all she might not excuse her brother and yield to his influence, which Dalton knew would be used against him.

This was a problem that occupied his day fully; for no sooner had he, after an almost endless chain of arguments, arrived at the determination to write Margaret setting his case fully before her and asking for a definite answer from her, but his brain would take a sudden whirl and begin upon an equally endless chain the conclusion of which would be that his only honorable and self-respecting course was to wait for some word of explanation or apology from Margaret.

Into this see-saw of reasoning one argument always entered with equal weight on either side. Did it seem to him that he ought to write to Margaret and declare himself fully, then he was absolutely certain that her engagement to Hugh was but a figment of Peyton's brain fabricated for Peyton's base purposes. Did he decide he must wait for a letter from Margaret, the argument that weighed most with him was his feeling of almost absolute certainty that she was engaged to Hugh. He had no rest from this ceaseless swing of the pendulum, and he began to feel as the captive beast of the forest must feel that paces restlessly up his narrow cage only to turn and pace as restlessly down again—hour after hour through the long, weary day.

His reprieves had come when he went to the dining car. There he resolutely threw aside his doubts and became once more the genial travelling companion and sympathetic friend. The men who had left him undisturbed in the library car felt at liberty to gather round his table now, as they finished their own dinners, and he became once more the center of animated discussion, or perhaps more truly the object of respectful attention, since it was to listen to him rather than to talk with him that men gathered around him.

But at the evening meal, Frank and he were almost alone; for they had gone into the dining car late. They had a table to themselves, and there was no one else in the car but a conductor at one table and a lady with her child at another.

Frank's excitement had been increasing as the day

wore on, that was quite evident to John, and he now turned to the conductor across the aisle from them and inquired if he could tell him how long before they would reach Columbus.

"We'll be there in ten minutes," said the conductor, glancing at his watch.

"Ten minutes!" ejaculated Frank, then he pulled out his watch also and consulted it with a startled air.

For the next ten minutes he *fidgeted;* there was no other word to express it, Dalton thought, as he wondered what there was in Columbus that could have such an effect on Frank. He would not ask him, since Frank had not volunteered any explanation of his excitement, but they were sitting on the side of the car next the station and as they drew into it, Frank excused himself nervously, and Dalton did not consider it prying to glance out of his window and follow his retreating figure, taking the long flight of steps that leads up to the station offices three at a time.

He must have met a messenger boy at the top of the flight, for he returned almost immediately, coming down the steps as slowly as he had gone up them rapidly, his eyes intent on a telegram he held in his hand.

It looked like a mystery to John. Why had not Frank told him he was expecting a telegram at Columbus? It was not his way to make a secret of anything with him —was his friend becoming alienated also? Then he remembered that he had not been confiding to Frank all the hopes and doubts that had been engrossing him for the last few days, and if Frank had some interesting little

affair of his own on his hands (John could not believe that it could for a moment compare in importance with his), why should he quarrel with him?

So he endeavored not to notice Seton's embarrassed air as he took his seat again at the table.

"Did you get what you wanted, Frank?" he asked by way of appearing to suspect nothing, and saying the thing the occasion would seem to demand.

"Yes and no," answered Frank slowly. Then he hesitated as if intending to say something more, but the conductor of the car came up at that moment and informed them that the diner was about to be taken up into the yards and left there, and they had better get back into their own car.

"Come out on the observation platform, John, and I'll tell you all about it," said Frank, as they entered the library car, deserted for the moment, but blazing with electric lights under whose glare Seton felt sure he could never tell his story.

Out on the broad platform, railed in and seated with comfortable chairs for observation, they lighted their cigars. They were in semi-darkness, and Frank carefully turned his back to the squares of light that came through the windows of the car, and as they rolled up into the dark yards and were switched forward and back in that apparently aimless fashion peculiar to switching engines, he began:

"I've proposed to Miss Delauney, John." He plunged in abruptly, for he could think of no circumlocution equal to the subject.

"What! *You! Proposed!!*" exclaimed Dalton, startled out of all sense of how unflattering his italics might sound to Frank, for this was far beyond anything he had suspected.

"Yes," replied Frank briefly.

John recovered himself with an effort.

"Well? She has accepted you, I take it? You have my hearty congratulations, old fellow!"

"Don't be in a hurry," said Frank, blushing crimson, but thankful that John could not see him, since his back was to the light, "I haven't got my answer yet."

"Oh!" said John.

"No," said Frank, growing every moment more embarrassed, but determined to go through with it.

"You see, this is the way. I kind o' started it there at Kentwick, but our visit was cut a little short, you know, and I didn't have time to finish it; so I asked her to wire 'yes or no' to Columbus."

"Oh?" said John again.

"Yes," replied Frank again.

"Why didn't you tell me what was going on? I would never have let you come away with me for a minute if I had dreamed there was anything serious between you and Miss Delauney."

John's regret was mingled with irritation at Frank that he should have allowed his affairs to be so unnecessarily bungled, and both showed in his voice.

"Oh don't feel bad about that," said Frank. "In fact I prefer it this way. Perhaps you don't know it, old fellow, but proposing to a girl face to face is a very

difficult matter."

"No, I have had no experience," said John grimly. And then he added with intense interest:

"But what was her answer? I suppose you received her telegram?"

"Yes," said Frank.

"Well, what did it say?"

"It said, 'Have sent letter to Holland House.'" And then he added, after a scarcely perceptible pause—"What would you make of that, John?"

John took his cigar out of his mouth, threw back his head and sent two or three rings of smoke whirling up into the cool damp evening air of the yards, so grateful after the stuffy car, while he thought.

"Well," he said slowly, as the result of his deliberations, "I shouldn't call it discouraging. But was that all she said? Didn't she give you the slightest clue as to what her answer would be?"

"There *was* one thing, John," said Frank diffidently. "I'm not sure it meant anything, but it seemed to me it might."

"Well, what was it?" asked John, encouragingly, as Frank still hesitated.

"The telegram was signed 'Julie'"—apparently the act of articulation was growing more difficult for Frank every moment—"You know I have never called her anything but Miss Delauney; shouldn't you think that was a bit encouraging?"

"Why, it's the whole thing!" exclaimed John enthusiastically. "It's a dead give-away! No, I don't think

its too soon for congratulations; here they are, old man!" and John seized Frank's hand in an iron grip.

"Oh wait a bit, won't you?" demurred Frank sheepishly, but evidently well pleased, "Wait till I get my letter!"

They sat out on the observation platform long after they had been switched back to the station, and the train had rolled out of the city and was speeding away through the night over the green fields and between the wooded hills of Ohio toward the rugged mountains of Pennsylvania. They talked it all over seriously. It seemed to both of them a strange and wonderful thing that after all these years one of them should be going to marry, and they spoke of it diffidently and with the reverence of men unspoiled by the world and still cherishing the ideals of their youth. John tried to say every pleasant thing he could think of about Julie, but he had really noticed her so little—having been always, when she was present, absorbed in Margaret—that he had not much to say. She seemed to him as Frank had once expressed it, "a nice child," but no doubt Frank had found somethnig more in her than that, something that he, at least, thought quite worthy of his love.

The fact that she was Margaret's friend seemed to John sufficient guaranty of her worth, and then with the selfishness that is deep in every man's heart, no matter how well he may keep it out of even his own sight, he wondered how this marriage was going to affect him. Was it going to leave him bereft of his friend? And would the rest of his life be lonely with a loneliness he had never

yet dreamed of, when Frank had been always at his beck and call? He had heard that marriage has more or less the effect of estranging friends—was losing Frank the last blow fate had kept in reserve for him?

John did not let his sense of loneliness appear to Seton as they talked on, recalling the incidents of their brief acquaintance with the Kentwick people, or looking forward to what the future might have in store for them—both past and future looking to John in his present state of despondency as dim and ghostlike as the shadowy forms of the night gliding by them on either side of the rushing train.

Frank rose at last and said that he must write a little note to Miss Delauney—he hesitated on the name and John was sure he wanted to say "Julie" but did not dare —to tell her that he had received her telegram.

"I'll give it to the porter," he said, "to mail at Pittsburg, and then I'm going to turn in."

"All right," answered John, "I'll sit here while you write it."

He watched Frank through the window sit down at the desk, draw a sheet of paper towards him and then hold his pen suspended so long that John turned away, half embarrassed for his friend and feeling that he had unintentionally been spying.

"He doesn't know how to begin it," he said to himself with his whimsical smile, and then he gave himself up to his own musings, where Frank's affairs were soon forgotten.

Frank came out after a while with his note finished.

"Don't wait for me," said John, "I'm not sleepy—I'll sit out here a while longer and keep cool."

A sudden compunction stirred Frank. In his own happiness—or sometimes he was not sure whether it was happiness or not, but at least in his excitement, he had forgotten how all this might affect his friend.

"John," he said quickly, "you're sure you don't mind? It won't make any difference in our friendship, will it? You won't let it, John? And you're not sorry, are you?"

Frank spoke in a tone of alarm, as of one asking information about some strange new state, of which he was wholly ignorant and half afraid.

"Sorry!" said John earnestly, "I'm glad for you, Frank, and I shall expect you to share some of your happiness with your old bachelor friend. It *need* not make any difference in our friendship, and I don't believe it will."

Then he reached up to Frank where he stood beside him and grasped his hand warmly.

"Good-night! Go to bed and dream of her. I've my thoughts for company, and I shall sit up a while. And tell that porter, please, not to sell my berth to anyone else if I should happen to be late coming in."

John sat on the platform smoking fitfully and watching the stars in their constellations whirl by as they wound among the hills, until one by one the passengers had deserted the library car and the porter had turned down the lights. Still he stayed on alone in the dark with his thoughts, until, rising at last, he threw away his cigar and turned to go back to his sleeper.

"God bless him!" he said aloud to the stars. "He's a dear old fellow and he's been a faithful friend."

And then he added reverently, as if it were indeed a prayer:

"And God bless Peggy!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MAN FROM THE WEST.

Dalton's conference with the party leaders resulted as might have been expected. Jim Burton would not have allowed him to leave New York without getting his pledge to go on the stump and he began by using the weapon he thought most powerful: flattery of Dalton concerning his immense personal influence. But he soon saw that Dalton was not vulnerable on the side of his vanity, and he changed his tactics. It was his appeal to his love for the party that brought him to terms, and before he started home, Dalton had promised to swing into line the States that were loyal to him.

"You take care of New York," he had said to Burton, "and I will look out for my States."

"Oh, New York will be all right," answered Burton. "Our man is solid with his own State."

Nothing could have been better for Dalton than this plunge into arduous work. There were conferences to be called at once in his own State and in the States that had voted with him at the convention, and a program of speeches and speakers laid out for the next four months. When Dalton glanced at his own particular program arranged for him by the committee to whom he had entrusted it, he pursed his lips for a long whistle. He was down for every town of any size in the seven States included in his immediate following, and often it was not

one speech a day, but three that had been arranged for. He was inclined to remonstrate at first. They had given him the labors of Hercules—had they forgotten he was flesh and blood? Certainly it was a tribute to his tremendous powers and a recognition of his splendid vitality. John himself, feeling old and broken since the convention, thought they had made a mistake, but he had a reckless feeling also, that it was a good way to make an end of a career that had spelled only failure, and if hard work could kill then he should literally die in the harness.

But as the weeks went on, John showed no symptoms of dying. Eating and sleeping on trains, almost his only rest was in the hours spent in moving from one appointment to another, yet he grew steadily stronger, the old fire returned in full measure and he felt once more the amazing vigor of his youth.

He had need of all his wonderful powers, for wherever he went he met a stubbornness that appalled him. "We don't want that Easterner and his trusts—we want you," was the universal cry he encountered, and it took all the ingenuity, all the eloquence and all the personal magnetism with which he was so richly endowed, to convert that cry into the nobler one—"We'll stand by our party and the platform."

"I'm for my party and my party's nominee, and the man who is my political friend will vote with me," he often wound up after an hour of clear logic and thrilling oratory, and it was that personal note that most often carried the day, for seldom did he leave the stand till his

audience, as one man, had pledged themselves to vote as he voted.

Through these strenuous weeks, Margaret was not forgotten. In moments of relaxing, on some swiftly moving train when Seton, who was his faithful companion through the whole campaign, thought him asleep, he was with closed eyes letting himself recall the vision of her loveliness. It was a luxury that he never permitted himself for more than a few moments at a time. He had set away her memory in a place apart as something sacred from which he would rarely withdraw the veil and then only for a moment, and he resolutely turned to sterner thoughts after one brief glimpse.

It was well for him that he had much stern thinking to do that allowed him little time for dreams even if he had desired it, and well too that the fatigues of his work were so great that often in the very act of yielding to the luxury of dreams, he sank into deep and dreamless slumber. He had had no word from Beauvoir in all this time, but there was no bitterness in his heart toward Margaret on that account, for he had no doubt that Peyton was responsible for her having sent him no message of sympathy or encouragement.

But there he was wrong. When Peyton had learned—which was not for several days—of the failure of his note to reach Dalton, he had said at once—"I will write another and send it to his home address." But it was Margaret who prevented it.

"No," she demurred, "You have shown me your good will, and I am satisfied. What does it matter, after all,

what Mr. Dalton thinks of us? It is not likely we will ever see him again."

Peyton, who was now honestly ashamed of his treatment of Dalton, would have liked to insist, but Margaret was firm.

"No," she repeated, "I really prefer you should not, Peyton." And so he let it drop, secretly a little glad that through no fault of his own there would be no chance for taking up again the broken threads of this acquaintance that had proved so disastrous to his hopes for Margaret. Secretly hoping, also, that with Dalton entirely out of her life, Margaret might turn again to Hugh.

Margaret hardly knew why she had been so insistent that Peyton should not write Dalton. Certainly she still cringed and flushed with shame as she thought of how he must regard her, believing in her engagement to Hugh. But she had so set her heart on his receiving Peyton's note immediately, putting her right in his eyes at once and, she hoped, re-establishing the friendly relations, that the miscarriage of the note came as a crushing blow. It seemed to her one of those decrees of fate not to be struggled against, and she accepted it with dull apathy, very unlike the usual imperious energy with which she was wont to surmount all obstacles to her will.

Her apathy also was tinged with a little bitterness toward Dalton. He had left Kentwick with no message of farewell for her, merely including her in his Beauvoir friends and that only for the sake of appearances. It would have been very easy for him to write her a note expressive of his sympathy for her in the trying scene

through which they had both passed, and, if he desired, writing the words that the arrival of Peyton had interrupted. He could not think that a note to her would be intercepted; he could not hold Peyton's sense of honor so low as to dream he would place an espionage on her mail; and when day after day passed and no word from him that she had thought at first so certainly would come, she believed it could only be accounted for by one of two reasons: either Dalton included her in his resentment of the insults offered him in her presence, or he had never cared for her as she had allowed herself to suppose he did, and had now quite forgotten her. The second of these alternatives was very bitter to her self-esteem, but for that very reason, perhaps, she morbidly clung to it as the true solution of his silence.

It would have been hard to shut him from her thoughts if she had tried, for every paper she picked up chronicled his doings, and many of them, of his party or not, devoted an editorial column to the tremendous capacity for work of the man and the wonderful influence he still held in the party that had tried to discredit him; and in spite of her bitterness toward him, Margaret could not read such sentences without tingling with pride.

The second Tuesday of November found Dalton and Seton in New York. Dalton's work was over. There was no doubt his States would do their duty and therefore no reason why he should not accept an urgent invitation from some of his New York friends to come on

and watch the returns at the party headquarters. A large faction in New York had always been for Dalton, and though they had submitted gracefully to the party's edict and worked faithfully for Berkeley, they were in heart still loyally devoted to Dalton and liked to seize every opportunity to show him their friendliness.

A room in one of the great Fifth Avenue hotels bore above its door the inscription, "Headquarters," and in and out of this room poured the throng overflowing into the corridors and into the café where, as the night went on, cocktails and highballs were in greater demand in proportion as the returns became less and less encouraging.

The headquarters buzzed and clicked with the sound of the telegraph machines, and as the operators, every few moments, posted up returns from some new county or State, it was greeted with cheers if it promised the least encouragement for Berkeley, or with profound silence, if his opponent was in the lead.

It had been a tremendous confusion at first of enthusiasm and excitement. The campaign had been an extremely quiet one with no indications as to results, but that very fact had made most of the party confident that at last they were to have their turn in administering the government. They were the more certain of it, because the opposing candidate during those few months had made several mistakes that had been severely criticized by the country, while their own had maintained his discreet silence almost unbroken to the end.

Their first enlightenment had come when the returns

from the counties in Berkeley's own state began to arrive. The betting—which is the straw that shows the current of opinion—had been heavy on this. Those of his friends who were not willing to risk much money on the result of the election at large, had been eager to offer big odds on the result in the state, and with comparatively few takers. They were jubilantly on hand to watch the returns, and ready for their profit taking.

In a parlor sufficiently remote from the Headquarters to allow its turmoil to reach them only as a subdued murmur, a dozen or twenty of the party leaders, at ease on sofas or lounging chairs, and with every appliance for spending the night comfortably, were watching the returns with no less eager eyes than the rank and file had shown in their crowded quarters.

Jim Burton and the chairman of the National Committee had been the first to arrive, and had taken their places at a broad table liberally supplied with writing materials, where they had at once set to work figuring out again as they had figured it out many times before, the probable results. As one after another dropped in, these two constituted themselves hosts to bid them welcome, and exchange hopeful prophecies with the new comers. A late arrival entered with the air of having something of interest to communicate, and he could hardly wait to return the chairman's greeting before he fired off his bomb—

"Did you know Dalton is in town?"

Burton, who had not noticed the new comer, having

been engaged with others when he came in, lifted his head at the sound of Dalton's name.

"Dalton!" exclaimed the chairman, a quick frown appearing and disappearing between his eyes, "What brings him here?"

"Oh, a lot of the boys wired him to come on and watch the returns. They'll all be up here presently, I suppose."

Evidently the new comer thought he was the bearer of pleasant news, and plumed himself accordingly. Every one in the room had stopped to listen at the sound of Dalton's name, and to three-fourths of the listeners it evidently was pleasant news. Burton and the chairman exchanged a significant glance, and then Burton spoke for the chairman, and his tones were of the suavest:

"That's good news you're bringing us, Mr. Mackey; where did you hear it?"

But Mr. Mackey had no chance to reply for the door opened at that moment to admit a party of eight or ten men and two of the party were Dalton and Seton, and nothing could have been more cordial than the greetings they both received from Burton and the chairman.

"You're as good at hand-shaking as the President, Mr. Dalton," said Burton pleasantly, as the men who had crowded around Dalton at his entrance and seized his hand each in turn, gave way to let him seat himself at the table at an invitation from the chairman.

"Oh, he's in training," quickly interposed Mackey, who was a whole souled Irishman; "he'll have to come to it yet."

Everybody laughed, including Dalton. Burton smiled politely, and then asked:

"What news are you bringing us from the West, Mr. Dalton?"

"Everything's in good shape, I think. I believe I have kept my part of the bargain, Mr. Burton—how about yours?"

"Oh, New York'll be all right," answered Burton carelessly, but something in his tones made Dalton think he did not believe what he was saying.

An operator in a small adjoining room, in which a machine had been placed, entered to post a bulletin, and the men began to crowd around to get a first glimpse of it.

"Wait a minute, boys, please!" Burton called to them authoritatively. "This is the first bulletin, and before any of the returns come in, I want to make a statement. I just want to say, that no matter how the election results—whether Berkeley wins or is defeated,—I am out of politics from now on. I wanted to say it to you now so that in case of defeat you wouldn't think it was because I was disgruntled that I am withdrawing. It will be just the same however it turns. I am too old—you younger men have got to take it up now."

Amid the chorus of noes that followed, and—"You're younger than any of us, you'll never grow old," from Mackey, Dalton flashed a keen glance at Burton. It was the first suspicion he had had that the election was not going to suit him. Burton must have some data that none of the others had, for Dalton was perfectly sure that Burton would have been in no hurry to make his an-

nouncement before the returns came in if he had been half way assured of victory. Things had been going so very right in Dalton's territory that he had come on to New York to join in the jubilations, thoroughly convinced that victory was preening her wings to perch on their banner at last. He had a chance in the confusion that followed Burton's announcement to say to Seton without being overheard:

"Things must be looking rather bad when Jim Burton makes a speech like that. I am afraid it's all up." And Seton who had absolute confidence in Dalton's powers of seeing through a stone wall, thought instantly of a little out-standing bet or two and mentally felt his pockets so much the lighter by their amounts.

No one else seemed to share Dalton's suspicions, and the first bulletin but added to the hilarity—one county overwhelmingly for Berkeley! But there were not many bulletins like the first one. Returns began to come in rapidly, and it was soon evident that Berkeley had not carried his own state. Consternation showed in the faces of the men all turned toward Burton, and the Irishman Mackey, in a white heat, blurted out:

"What the devil does this mean, Burton?"

"It's all that damned resolution!" shouted Burton, losing control of himself as he saw they were holding him responsible. "How could you expect an eastern state to support a platform like that?"

There was dead silence around the room for a moment, every man glancing furtively at Dalton. He would have preferred not to notice Burton's speech—he could easily

make allowance for this moment of irritation—but their silence was imperative; there was no escaping it.

"Wait a little, Mr. Burton," he said pleasantly, "till the returns come in from my section. I think you'll find they fully balance New York, and we wouldn't have carried one of those states without that resolution."

The speech was intended to be soothing, but it only aroused Burton to greater fury; Dalton had accomplished his part of the bargain, Burton had failed to carry out his—bringing New York into line. The chairman saw that Burton was only waiting for Dalton to finish what he was saying to spring at him with greater venom. He forestalled him. Hardly waiting for Dalton to utter his last word, he exclaimed:

"Look at the bulletins, Burton! There's encouragement for you!" And he accompanied his words with a glance that brought Burton to his senses.

He turned to consult the bulletins sullenly. They were coming in from Dalton's states each one bringing glorious news. There was too much genuine good feeling in Burton not to be ashamed of the mean spirit of jealousy in which he had been indulging. He turned to Dalton with a hearty apology for his speech, and followed it up with a few cordial words of praise for the good work he had evidently been doing in the West. His apology was made in a voice loud enough to be heard by everyone in the room. The insult had been public, so should the reparation be. It restored harmony at once, for there were many present ready to resent any slight to their favorite, and the mutterings of a threatened

storm had already made themselves audible.

The cheering news from the West had further promoted good feeling and for a half hour jovial hilarity reigned supreme. Then the tide turned. Dalton's states had all been heard from, and there seemed to be none following their lead. City after city, county after county, state after state, all rolling in tremendous majorities for the opposing candidate, began to seem after a while like something supernatural—a great tidal wave had swept the country bearing him on its crest to the White House.

Deep gloom began to settle down upon the little band gathered in the comfortable hotel parlor. Some of them had met in that same room on many other election nights. They had known defeat, but never anything like this. They spoke to each other in tones half hushed with awe, as telegram followed telegram, all bearing the same tale. They were not office-seekers, these men, and there was nothing sordid in their great anxiety and intense disappointment; but they were the leaders of their party and they knew that on their shoulders would fall the whole crushing weight of this defeat. The country would hold them responsible. They had honestly believed that they had a good show for winning this time—more than a fighting chance—and if they should lose, that they would at least have the satisfaction of giving the other side a close call. But there was never anything like this; it was a land-slide; it was a miracle!

"Looks a little as if Berkeley was going to be snowed under," said Mackey, with a dismal attempt at jocular-

ity, as another of those terrible telegrams came in reporting a state on which they had all confidently relied—a state that had never before failed them—gone over to the enemy.

"How do you account for it, Burton?" some one asked. Burton groaned and shook his head:

"I don't account for it—what do you think, Dalton?"

"I believe," said Dalton, speaking slowly, "that the politicians in both parties have been equally at fault; I believe the other fellows will be as amazed as we are at the result. This has been no campaign of issues—it has been a purely personal campaign. There is something in their candidate that has taken the heart of the people by storm. He is alive and full of generous impulses and if he sometimes blunders they like him the better for that—it shows them he's human. Berkeley has been but a meaningless name to them. It may have been wisdom on the part of the managers to keep him still while they did the talking, but people are not going to vote for a dim and shadowy ghost when they have a flesh and blood man always vividly in the public eye. This has been a campaign of the people. The machine on both sides was never more thoroughly organized or more admirably equipped, but the people have ignored the machine. They have done their own thinking and their own voting."

There was a little burst of applause as Dalton ceased speaking. There was something in the man that aroused enthusiasm in every man that heard him even when what he was saying was in itself far from inspiring. Only Jim

Burton and the chairman sat irresponsive, with set smiles, bearing the lash as well as they could.

It was Dalton's hour. For deeply as he felt the party's defeat—and no man felt it more, since no man had worked harder to secure victory—he was grimly recognizing the nemesis of this hour. It was as he had said, the machine had over-reached itself, and he was now receiving his vindication in the presence of the very men who had done their best to discredit him.

The night wore on and the gloom settled deeper. Here and there a little ray pierced its solid folds—they had won a govenor where they hardly dared to hope for it—but the presidency was irretrievably lost. By one o'clock there could no longer be any doubt and Dalton and his party rose to take leave.

"Give us a speech, Dalton, before you go," cried the irrepressible Mackey. "Perhaps the sound of your voice will comfort us a bit."

Dalton smiled and looked at Burton. Not that Burton had any especial authority here, but he seemed to have assumed it to himself and Dalton would not ignore it.

"Go on," said Burton gloomily, and the others took up the chorus: "Dalton!" "Dalton!"

But Dalton shook his head. He knew that what he had to say would not comfort Burton.

"The best speech I can make you, boys," he said with his whimsical smile "is, go home and go to bed, and better luck next time!"

He was turning to go, but Mackey sprang to his feet.

"Wait a minute, please," he cried to Dalton, "I'll make your speech for you. Boys, there's one thing we've got to remember—our next candidate must *not* be an eastern man, and the man and the party must both have some issue at stake; some principles they are ready to make a fight for."

He had stirred his little audience to the quick. They all knew what he meant and as one man they rose to their feet shouting Dalton's name and gathered around him tumultuously to grasp his hand.

With the others rose Jim Burton and came slowly around the table to where Dalton was standing and held out his hand.

"You're right Dalton," he said, "as you always are. We all of us know it now. And if I were not out of politics I would see to it next time that our nominee was a western man with an issue."

CHAPTER XXVI.

PEYTON WRITES A LETTER.

Dalton and Seton spent a week in New York after the election and boarded the midnight train for the west quite worn out with a round of festivities given in Dalton's honor, which Seton had enjoyed almost more than Dalton. He liked to see his friend sought after eagerly by the great Fifth Avenue houses, and it pleased him with a childish pleasure to read in the morning *Herald* accounts of dinners and receptions in Dalton's honor. He did not fail to send marked copies of these papers to Julie and naturally Julie did not fail to show them to Margaret, and Margaret did not fail to call Peyton's attention to the fact that Mr. Dalton was honored guest in the most exclusive houses in the land. She found a certain pleasure in this, the pleasure one feels in gritting a sore tooth to make it ache, or in magnifying an irreparable loss, or perhaps the childish and ill natured pleasure of making Peyton feel still more keenly the enormity of his crime towards Dalton.

Peyton bore it very well, for Peyton, quite unknown to Margaret, had been doing his duty. It had been a long deferred duty, one that he had known he should have discharged weeks ago and that had kept him uneasy and not quite happy because it had not been discharged. But two weeks before he had made a sudden resolve and had at once put it into execution. He had written to Dalton.

It had been a miserable fall for Peyton. Margaret

made no display of unhappiness nor did she seem to cherish resentment against her brother, but Peyton felt keenly that the happy buoyancy that had been one of her chief charms was gone; and still more keenly, that an invisible barrier had been erected between them—nothing tangible but the old confidence had been destroyed.

Margaret and Hugh were on the best of terms. They saw much of each other, and their intercourse seemed to be very sweet and friendly. For a while Peyton hoped much from that, but he could not see that Margaret's spirits grew any the less grave or her eyes any the brighter as the weeks went on, and he had at last begun to despair.

It added to his unhappiness over Margaret that his interest in Helen had been growing deeper all these weeks and the thought that there should come into his own life this new and lovely interest which must, if it went on to its natural conclusion, shut out Margaret from the exclusive possession of her brother and compel her to share with another the sceptre that had always been hers, or worse, resign it to that other, made him yearn with the tenderness of a mother over the vision of Margaret, lonely and alone.

It kept him silent before Helen, and perhaps sometimes she wondered at his silence. On the night of the possum hunt he had told her that he believed Hugh and Margaret were engaged, and then he had added jestingly (but they both knew it was no jest), and with the freedom of a friendship of nearly forty year's standing:

"When Hugh marries Margaret will you marry me if

I ask you?"

And she had replied:

"I'll wait till you ask before I answer."

He had not asked, and added to his generous sympathy and regret for Margaret's evident unhappiness was a keen and more selfish irritation with himself that in meddling with Margaret's affairs he had bungled his own; and it was partly with a faint hope of setting his own matters right as well as Margaret's that he had written to Dalton.

He had expected a reply long before this, and he began now to find himself watching the mails very impatiently for a letter that it seemed to him was due him, if only from the barest courtesy.

As Dalton was stepping into his carriage at the Holland House to drive to the station, a bell boy came running out with a package of mail. He had been out to dinner and had only stopped at the hotel for his suit case, and it was the accumulated mail of the afternoon. The hour was late and he was tired and he knew it could wait, so that he did not even glance at it but threw it into his suit case to be read the next morning.

He and Seton both slept late and breakfasted late, and by the time they had finished breakfast they were winding up the beautiful Alleghany ridges, sombre now in their deep russets and browns or altogether bare of foliage. They went back to the observation platform, for the mountains were ever new and grand to these men of the western prairies, though Seton soon found the air too keen for him and urged Dalton to come inside where they

could have almost as fine a view through the windows. But John loved the bracing mountain air and was glad to have the platform to himself for a while. In all these months he had had but little time for thought and often when the time was not wanting he was so worn out that at the first moment of quiet he dropped into heavy slumber. Now his labors were over. He was on his way home where he should take up his law practice again and live quietly until his party had need of him once more.

But though he had had but little time for thought in these strenuous months, he had been able to come to one conclusion, he no longer see-sawed between conflicting opinions. He was now firmly convinced that Margaret was engaged to Hugh; on no other hypothesis could he account for the impenetrable silence at Beauvoir.

He had heard from Hugh occassionally, pleasant little letters always including a mention of Peyton and Margaret, but with no reference to any engagement. That did not affect his conviction, however, for he did not suppose that Hugh considered himself on sufficient terms of intimacy with him to warrant a confidence. Frank's letters from Julie were more convincing. They were full of pleasant gossip about the Kentwick circle, and always Hugh and Margaret's names were bracketed together in her accounts of rides and dinners and teas.

For Seton was engaged to Julie. It had been a rather stormy courtship. That letter awaiting Frank at the Holland House had not warranted Dalton's congratulations. It had been only another bit of delicate angling on Julie's part, professing her own unworthiness and

fearing Frank's proposal was but a concession to his fancied sense of duty. The difficulties had but stirred Frank's ardor, and Julie was besieged by a perfect whirlwind of letters and telegrams until at the end of two months she was glad to capitulate gracefully.

The courtship was conducted entirely by mail and wire. Frank pleaded the necessities of the campaign as an excuse for not appearing in person to forward his suit, but the facts were he greatly preferred this method which spared his blushes and gave him the advantage of saying exactly what he wanted to, which he knew would have been impossible to him if compelled to use his voice instead of his pen.

The wedding was set for early in June, and was to be celebrated at Kent Hall among the roses, since Julie was mistress only of a city apartment and Helen, who had been a sort of fairy godmother to her, insisted it should be at Kent Hall and be lacking in none of the lovely accessories befitting a June bride. John understood from Frank that there had been a friendly rivalry between Helen and Margaret as to whether the wedding should be at Kent Hall or Beauvoir, but that Helen insisted on the right her superior years gave, and Margaret had yielded; and John could easily see that the friendly contention had greatly pleased Frank as an evidence of the esteem in which his fiancée was held.

John was thinking of the wedding now as he sat watching the stately procession of mountain peaks circle slowly by him. Frank of course, was all excitement about it. His last remark, before pleading the cold as an excuse to

retreat to the interior of the car, had been:

"I'm glad this campaign is over. Now I can begin to think of my preparations for June—it's high time."

John smiled as he glanced through the window and saw Frank seated at a desk entirely oblivious to the grand views marching by the wide windows, while his pen flew over the paper. John did not doubt he was writing Julie about his plans for the great house he had been talking to him about. Frank had heretofore preferred bachelor apartments, but now he was planning a house and grounds that were to rival Dalton's in grandeur and Dalton's had been his hobby for years and the show place of his city.

Thinking of Frank's wedding always set John's pulses to a quicker pace. He could not very well absent himself from his friend's wedding if he had desired it. He was to be best man, of course, and he believed Frank would refuse to be married if any untoward circumstance should keep him away. He had not told anyone of the quarrel at Beauvoir, and so Frank suspected no reason why it would not be altogether delightful for John to be present at his wedding. There had been moments when John had thought he would not be able to go through with it, and on some pretext or other, perhaps just at the last moment when it could make no difference in the arrangements, he would find means of escape. But he had given that up now. He said grimly to himself if Peyton and Margaret did not want to see him they could stay away from the wedding—his first duty was to Frank. But none the less as he thought of June—still

seven months away, but drawing swiftly nearer with every whirl of the old earth on her axis, his breath came quicker and his pulse beats were stronger, for whether he greatly dreaded it or strongly desired it (and for the life of him he could not tell which feeling was uppermost), he would see Margaret once more.

It was to drive away such fancies, as he called them, as these that he bethought him of his mail, and sent a porter back to his sleeper to bring him his suit case. As he took his letters out and began to look them over, one envelope arrested his attention. It had been sent first to his home address, then followed him to two or three places where he had been making speeches, returned to his home and finally forwarded to New York. He did not know the writing, but what caught his eye was the original postmark. It was from Margaret's city, and he could never see a letter from that city without a little excitement. He saw at once, however, that this was a man's writing, and he opened the envelope and drew out the letter with some curiosity but no premonition of the message it bore. As usual with him in receiving a letter from an unknown correspondent, he glanced first at the signature. "Peyton LeBeau!" It was a thunderbolt from a clear sky! In an agitation that he found difficult to control, he turned quickly back to the first page and began to read.

Peyton had begun his letter by telling of his former note sent on the afternoon of the quarrel, but just too late to catch Dalton. He told him also he had desired many times to send him another of the same purport, but

he had been prevented by circumstances. Then he told him of the contents of that first note—that it had been written with a two fold purpose: first to tell him that he had been guilty of a great blunder; that he had honestly supposed his sister engaged to Mr. Kent, but that he had discovered his mistake after Mr. Dalton had left the house and he had hastened to correct it.

John could read no further for a while. Margaret not engaged to Hugh! Then was his world turned upside down again. For the first time in many weeks he allowed himself a few minutes of golden dreams—what might have been! What still might be—he said to himself with sudden energy. Then he resolutely set aside the dreams and went on with the letter.

Peyton's second purpose had been, he said, to make the most complete and contrite apology possible for his actions of that dreadful afternoon. He enlarged upon that point, making some slight excuse for himself because of his misunderstanding about Hugh, but not on that account palliating in any degree the enormity of his offence. He concluded by saying that he hoped some day Mr. Dalton might feel like renewing the friendly relations with Beauvoir that he himself had so rudely severed.

So far Peyton's note gave John only unalloyed pleasure and he was for following Frank's example, taking posession of a writing desk, answering Peyton's note at once and following it up by a letter to Margaret. The blood was racing through his veins, he felt twenty years younger than when he had come out on that platform to watch the mountains, which, by the way, were still gliding

grandly by John, but had lost their compelling interest for him.

Then his eye caught a little word at the bottom of the page that had escaped his notice—"(over)". He turned the page joyfully, expecting more happiness in store for him and fell into a pit blacker than any he had yet known.

"For some reason," wrote Peyton, "that I do not quite understand, my sister has strongly objected to my writing you this explanation. For the present, therefore, until I can find a convenient opportunity to tell her myself that I have done so, I think it would be better that you should not betray me."

What meddling little imp had induced Peyton to add this postscript! Certainly he was himself guiltless of any evil intent. Margaret had impressed him so strongly that she did not want this note written, and he stood in such awe of his sister when her mind was set on any course, that it may have been only a little cowardice on his part, hoping that he would find an opening by which he might gently inform her of what he had done and so escape the wrath which he felt sure would be visited upon him if it should be first blurted out by Dalton. Or he may have had what seemed to him a very deep and cunning design; he may have thought that telling Dalton this would so pique his curiosity and interest that he would at once move heaven and earth to get back on the old friendly footing with Margaret.

Whatever his idea may have been in writing that postscript, it certainly had an effect far from any of his intending. Dalton's humility where a woman was con-

cerned was very great, and it was a towering humility where Margaret was concerned. She did not want Peyton to apologize! Evidently she had expressed her wishes so strongly that Peyton was afraid of her anger should she discover what he had done. There was only one explanation for that—she wanted the past irrevocably closed. Well, it should be! And then he fell into musings as black and joyless as a few minutes before they had been golden and joyful. He would answer Peyton's note of course and at once. No LeBeau should find him wanting in courtesy.

Into these musings Frank broke, stepping out of the car door holding an open letter in his hand.

"There's a bit in this letter may interest you, John," he said, "shall I read it?"

"If you will," said John, rousing himself to give courteous attention.

Frank read:

"I am just about convinced that Margaret *is* engaged to Hugh, though she has kept us all guessing all the fall. But something she said last night almost as much as confessed to it, and Hugh is looking so happy these days, it is next thing to proof positive."

"That explains it!" said John grimly as Frank folded his letter and returned it to its envelope.

"Explains what?" asked Frank looking up keenly.

"Oh nothing—nothing of any importance at least," answered John carelessly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DEUS EX MACHINA!

What Margaret had said that could have given Julie the impression that she was coufessing to an engagement, would have puzzled her to know, and if Hugh was looking unusually happy, as Julie thought, it must have been the inner light from a good conscience that illuminated his face.

In a way he was happy. He was having Margaret more to himself than he had had her for years. For the first time since he could remember, he told Margaret, there were no troublesome suitors hanging around; perhaps because Margaret did not seem to be going as much as usual into society, where suitors most do congregate. She excused herself from dinners and balls on the plea that she was taking The Fair seriously, and it was very exacting of both time and strength.

Hugh was seeing more of her also, because the LeBeaus were staying on in the country much later than usual. Hugh himself made his home at Kent Hall all the year round. He disliked the city for living in and loved the life of a country squire, as Peyton called him. The LeBeaus often stayed in the country until nearly or quite Christmas time, but this year they were going to stay until their annual migration to Florida in February. Very likely Hugh did look happier than usual, with Margaret to race over the country with him on Old Nell, and to be allowed to come home with her from these

bracing rides in the frosty November air and stay to dinner. Spending the evening with her and Peyton and Tia Elisa around a roaring fire of logs was much better than spending it alone at Kent Hall in bachelor state, or even than running into town in his motor car for dinner with his sister in Devonshire Place.

But if Hugh looked happier, it is certain Margaret did not. At least Hugh thought he missed something of the old brightness, and he set himself, in his slow way, to work out the reason why. He had heard nothing of the quarrel at Beauvoir, but he had often wondered why the acquaintance that had seemed well on the way to friendship between Margaret and Dalton, should have been so suddenly brought to a close. Hugh was very certain that the Beauvoir people did not hear from Dalton, and in Dalton's occasional letters to him he had never sent even the conventional message that might have been expected, to either Peyton or Margaret.

In the light of his own experience, there was only one way Hugh could account for it: Dalton had proposed and been refused. It seemed entirely natural to him that a week's acquaintance with Margaret should have been quite long enough for the birth, growth and final catastrophe of the great passion in Dalton. He had seen others fall as swiftly under Margaret's enchantment—it would have seemed more strange to him if Dalton had seen so much of her and not succumbed.

He worked it out, therefore, very satisfactorily to himself, that Dalton had been over-impetuous and proposed too soon—before Margaret knew her own heart. She

had refused him, of course, but had hardly expected him to accept her answer so readily as final. He had gone away and then Margaret had begun to discover that she was more deeply interested than she had supposed. He believed that Margaret was suffering in something of the same way in which she had innocently caused others to suffer.

If Hugh had been the ordinary discarded lover he might have gloated over this—feeling that a just Nemesis had at last overtaken her, and hoping, perhaps, to secure some advantage for himself out of it. But Hugh was not the ordinary lover; he was first and foremost Margaret's devoted and lifelong friend, and he suffered more in her suffering than in his own. How could he best set about to help her?

It had taken dear old Hugh, as Margaret called him, slow of brain but ready to act, many weeks to work out these conclusions. Margaret was in Florida before he had finally decided that her malady was love for Dalton. It took him several more weeks to settle upon a remedy, and Margaret was home again in her house in Devonshire Place before Hugh had come to the determination to take upon himself the part of Providence to these two friends.

He would write to Dalton. He came to that decision one evening at a dinner given to Margaret to celebrate her return after nine months of virtual absence from society. Hugh, keenly alive to Margaret's social triumphs, missed the sparkle and glow that had so dazzled him at other dinners. Not that she was dull or listless, she was doing her duty, but it was a little too obviously a duty, Hugh

felt.

Hugh's letter, the result of much laborious thought and many scratched and interlined copies which found their final resting-place in the waste-basket, was a model of cleverness in his own opinion. It was not so bad, and had those who knew him best read the letter and understood its object, they would have found it hard to believe that it was concocted by Hugh, alone and unaided.

"My dear Mr. Dalton"—(Hugh was always most formal and respectful in his address to Dalton—not because of the difference in years which was really very slight, but because of Dalton's standing as a power in the political world.

"The spring is here again, and Kentwick well worth seeing at this time of the year. Your friends here, including, of course, your friends at Beauvoir, are hoping, now that your campaign labors are over, you will find time to come on and finish the visit cut short last July. Of course we know you will be on at the wedding in June, but things will be in such a rush then there will be no satisfaction in a visit. Miss LeBeau thinks, perhaps, you didn't mind having your visit cut short last summer, and that our amusements here probably seem child's play to you, but I don't agree with her. At least I shall not unless you refuse to come, and then I will be compelled to, I suppose.

"You will find us just about as you left us last summer. Miss Delauney is the only one in the least changed, and her friends all think greatly for the better since the engagement. Peyton LeBeau and I are still confirmed old

bachelors; Tia Elisa is as charming as ever and often inquires for you, and Miss LeBeau, we think, is looking better since her Florida trip—she has not been very well this winter.

"I shall look for a speedy reply and a favorable one. You will not disappoint me? I want to prove to Miss LeBeau that I am a better reader of human nature than she is—that you *were* sorry to go away so soon last summer. Very truly yours,

HUGH KENT."

"Now," said Hugh to himself as he sealed and directed his letter, "I think I have managed to put in several neat little hooks; he surely ought to catch on one of them. Perhaps he'll discover, what I believe is true, that Margaret was piqued at his going off in that abrupt fashion. Very likely that has been the whole trouble and he didn't know it. Or, if that doesn't catch him, perhaps my little remark about Margaret not being well will—it ought to melt a heart of stone. And then I've provided for a third contingency. From some silly remark of Julie Delauney's the other evening, I was afraid she'd been writing Seton that Margaret and I were engaged. I think I let him know very neatly that I have no prospects."

Hugh thought his letter—of which he was not a little proud—all over again, and then he shook his head slowly and solemnly as if lost in wonder at himself.

"By Jove! Hugh, old boy!" he said aloud admiringly. "I'd no idea you were so clever. One of those hooks

ought to catch him—sure!"

Not one, but all three of the hooks had exactly the effect Hugh had intended. It had never occurred to Dalton that Margaret might feel keenly his going away from Kentwick without writing her or sending her any special message of good-bye. Now that it had been suggested to him, he did not see how she could have felt otherwise, and he reviled himself as a stupid old fellow. Also Hugh's information so cleverly conveyed, that he was *not* engaged to Margaret, brought joy to his heart. The field was clear, there was no reason why he should not go ahead! And last of all, Hugh's third hook buried itself deep in Dalton's heart. Margaret ill! Could it be possible that she had suffered as he had suffered? Up to this moment the thought of Margaret suffering had not seemed possible to him.

Of course he would accept Hugh's invitation. No, he would not wait for June—he would not have waited a day but for seeming too unconventionally eager.

It had come to be May by the time Hugh's letter had been written and received, and the LeBeaus, after the custom of many generations, had gone out to Beauvoir on the first. Mrs. Paxton had come out to Kent Hall at the same time, and to her alone and under the strictest promise of secrecy had Hugh confided his invitation to Dalton and Dalton's acceptance. Hugh was rapidly developing into a strategist of the first rank. He was planning now quite a spectacular *coup*, and this also he

confided to Helen, relying upon her co-operation in carrying it out.

Dalton had set his own time for arriving and it happened that he set it for the evening of an event that had been stirring society for weeks with the delightful tremors of anticipation. The younger set were going to give "As You Like It" under the trees at Elmhurst; ostensibly for the benefit of an East End Day Nursery much patronized by society, really that a few leading spirits might have an opportunity of displaying their histrionic talents, which they fancied remarkable, and their many charms and picturesque costumes, which were undoubtedly of the first quality, since nature had been prodigal with the charms and allowances and bank accounts had been sensibly diminished for the costumes.

Perhaps society would not have been quite so keen for mere amateur "dramatics," even under the trees in May, but tickets could only be bought by those who received invitations and not to be seen at Elmhurst that evening would mean that one was not quite within the pale of the exclusive set. Of course the Kents and LeBeaus could have no misgivings, but Julie Delauney declared loudly that she had not been sure of an invitation up to the minute of its arrival and she would have died if she had not received one. Which was only Julie's extravagant way of expressing the feeling of society in general.

Elmhurst was half across the county from Kentwick and much nearer the city. Almost *en masse* society was going to dine at the Country Club and then drive over to Elmhurst close by. At the last moment Hugh pleaded

an imperative business engagement as excuse for not dining there with his sister and Margaret and Peyton as had been arranged, but he would come out to Elmhurst in time for the play. Margaret wondered a little for Hugh was not usually a devotee to business, but she had no suspicion of the nature of his engagement.

Hugh met Dalton at the station in the city and hurried him up to his sister's house in Devonshire Place.

"You've just time for a quick change and a morsel of dinner," he told him, as he explained in full the great event that was absorbing society that evening.

"You'll meet all your friends out there," he continued. "I've told no one you're coming except Helen—we both thought it would be rather nice to surprise them."

Dalton thought he would have preferred a less dramatic meeting with Margaret than to come upon her unexpectedly with the eyes of her whole social circle focused upon them, but he was not going to demur at any of Hugh's arrangements, and he had sufficient confidence in Margaret's self-control, if not in his own, to believe her able to prevent any occasion for petty gossip.

Tubbing and grooming to the last degree of perfection were not operations that could be greatly hurried, especially when one of the two men was in such a state of excitement as to find his fingers all thumbs in the matter of collar button and neckties. Hugh was ready first and would have fretted a little at the delay as he waited for Dalton in the hall below, only that Hugh was not given to fretting. He felt himself more than repaid for any tax on his patience, when Dalton finally made his appearance,

for he was feeling all the responsibility of his position as sponsor for the meeting and the slightest sign of carelessness or of want of propriety in Dalton's dress to suit the occasion would have annoyed him greatly. It was quite with a feeling of pride in his protegé that he ushered him into the dining room, shady and cool in its shrouding summer linens, and as they lingered a little over the dainty little dinner served them by Helen's cook, old Chloe, left in charge of the house, his quick and apparently careless glances scrutinized his guest keenly and wonderingly.

What had made the change in him! Was it his association with those New York people last fall that had taught him all those little niceties that made him now so noticeably well dressed? Possibly, but the glow and sparkle in Dalton that seemed to have taken years from his age could not be so accounted for. No, there was probably one cause for it all—the expected meeting with Margaret; and Hugh found himself feeling an unselfish delight in the thought that Margaret would find the hard-working politician, worn with his labors, broken by disappointment, and a little careless in dress, transformed into the elegant and immaculate man of leisure, radiant with hope and bearing himself more like a conquering hero than a timorous suitor.

They lingered longer than they had intended over Chloe's broiled chicken and new peas, and the short twilight had given place to the stars before they found themselves on the road to Elmhurst. It was not a long drive; the car was in splendid running order, the evening

air blew fresh in their faces, and Hugh was in the highest of spirits. Dalton was talking easily on many topics, but his heart was beating tumultuously with every swift turn of the wheels bearing him nearer to Margaret. He would have liked to sit silent, looking at the stars and thinking long thoughts while he inhaled deep draughts of the air laden with the breath of rose and honeysuckle borne to them from park, plantations and country gardens as they flashed by them in the dewy night.

As they neared Elmhurst they overtook two or three other automobiles and carriages, laggards like themselves, and they slowed down to fall into line. As they turned in at the gate, the leader of the line took the left curve of the circular drive and the others followed him. Hugh knew better. He was at home at Elmhurst and knew that the right curve led off towards the stables. What he did not know was that this road led also directly past the spot selected for the play, and so it happened that rounding a curve they came in a flash into the heart of fairyland, and were like to be blinded and breathless at the unexpected blaze of beauty. Unconsciously Hugh slowed down, and so though there was less than a minute from the moment the fairy spectacle flashed upon them until they had rounded another curve and glided away in the darkness towards the great barns,—they saw it all with photographic distinctness. The terraces at the side of the house had been selected for the play and no place could have been more admirably fitted for an outdoor theatre. The broad lower terrace was the stage, and growing shrubbery and stately trees needed but

little additional arrangement of laurel screens and mossy seats to make it an ideal Rosalind's bower. On the terraces above, and on the verandah above the terraces, was seated the audience. A great limelight on an upper balcony flooded the stage and threw out in vivid relief its picturesque groups in russet and green, and incidentally the brilliant audience whose light summer muslins and flower hats and radiant faces were like a great parterre of wonderfully beautiful flowers.

Guided by some unerring instinct, John's glance had flown straight to Margaret and rested there for the brief moment of passing. She was seated on the front row of the lower terrace. Above and behind her rose the flower-like background of a bewildering maze of many colors and many faces, to John but a foil to the most beautiful face in the world. She had been so long only a dream to him, that to see her sitting there intent on the play, her lips half parted in a smile at Jacques' wit, her friends about her, Peyton on one side, Julie on the other, her face half turned towards him, clear cut and delicately tinted as a shell cameo under the white flare of the limelights, seemed to him too strange to be true.

He began to feel himself in a dream and was still half dazed when they had left their motor car at the stables and walked back to the scene of the play. They could not, without creating a disturbance, hunt for seats, so they took their stand beside a dense column of chauffeurs and coachmen massed on one side of the audience, and apparently as deeply interested in the stage as the invited guests. Standing at one side they were only in

half light and hardly distinguishable from the dark-coated throng of which they formed a part. That was very well, for had Dalton been in full light, he would himself have inevitably become the focus of all eyes. As it was, he could see Margaret without being seen and without apparently diverting his attention from the stage, where he recognized in the Rosalind who had just entered, the pretty debutante of last year's acquaintance.

It may have been a very good rendition of the play; certainly the woodland scenes and the picturesque grouping of the green and russet figures and the exquisite ballade music under the direction of a thorough artist could hardly have been improved upon. But it was all lost on Dalton. His brain was in a whirl, and he could hardly have told whether he had been standing there ten minutes or an hour when Hugh aroused him from his daze. There was a short intermission and the audience was stirring and breaking into a great ripple of talk and laughter.

"Come," said Hugh, "We'll go and find Helen and the others."

Margaret had turned to speak to Peyton; her back was toward them. Suddenly she saw Peyton's face light up, saw him spring to his feet with outstretched hand, and heard him say in his most cordial tones:

"Ah, how do you do? This is a surprise! We're very glad to see you."

She could not tell why she should know to whom Peyton was speaking, but she did know, just as certainly before she slowly turned as when she found herself look-

ing up into John's glowing eyes looking down on her. In that slow turning, with her face growing white and then red again, she had had time to summon all her will power and so she said very calmly, as she extended her hand—too calmly Hugh thought, who was watching her anxiously:

"How do you do, Mr. Dalton? When did you arrive?"

But John would have none of her formality. Now that he was actually speaking to her and holding her little hand in his great one, his bewilderment vanished and his sense of power returned. She winced a little under his strong, quick grasp, and seeing it, he dropped her hand.

"You haven't said you are glad to see me, Miss LeBeau," he said with his whimsical smile, and then he turned quickly to Mrs. Paxton and Julie without giving Margaret a chance to reply.

"*I'm* glad to see you," said Helen, with her soft smile. "We were so disappointed last summer to have your visit cut short."

"But I'm not," pouted Julie. "Why didn't you bring Mr. Seton with you? I don't see how you *dared* come without him!"

John thought Julie's engaged airs were very pretty. He had never observed her very closely before; he looked down on her now with a new interest and a keenly critical glance accompanied his smiling reply:

"Mr. Seton would certainly be with me if he had known anything about my coming. He was summoned to New York by an important telegram the other day. I fancy

it was from his tailor," he added, with a twinkle in his eye.

Julie blushed becomingly, and then others in the audience began to crowd around Dalton, eager to welcome him back, and the intermission was over before he had a chance to say another word to Margaret. He found himself sitting beside her, for Peyton had insisted on giving up his seat to him, and to his surprise he was feeling not a shade of that embarrassment or awkwardness that had sometimes assailed him in her presence. He was not quite sure what kind of a reception he was going to have from her when they should be once more alone, but he had come determined, since Hugh was not engaged to her, to leave no means untried to win her for himself; and the dauntless courage and strength of purpose that had carried him through every great crisis of his life was filling him now with the old fire and giving him unconsciously that confident bearing that was, although he did not know it, his strongest weapon.

All through the last act—a long hour—Margaret sat quietly beside him, occasionally exchanging a murmured word of comment, her eyes on the stage, but her mind utterly oblivious to all that was taking place there.

For a long time she was very careful not to turn her eyes in John's direction even when she was acknowledging some murmured word from him. She was glad of this enforced quiet, giving her time to collect herself and arrange her thoughts. They had been a maelstrom at first. What had brought him there! How did he and Peyton happen to be on such cordial terms! Should

she be still offended with him that he had written her no word since that unhappy afternoon last summer, or should she forgive him? What did that radiant air of triumph mean? But how it became him! She had forgotten he was so *grand* looking—for no other word seemed to express the noble bearing of his fine head borne proudly on his strong shoulders. She stole a look at him, but he caught her at it, and with an almost imperceptible shake of his head, he smiled down into her eyes, with a twinkling smile that seemed to say—I knew you would come to it at last!

She hardly knew whether to be vexed or to smile back at him. Oh, she would smile, of course; it would be silly to be vexed, and it was extremely silly to feel herself growing so red under his glance. Why should she not look at him if she wished! She would turn to him as often as occasion seemed to demand and as naturally as Helen was doing who sat on the other side. And then for the rest of the act she kept her face turned rigidly to the stage and all that John could see as his frequent glance rested on her was a fluff of filmy white and heliotrope, a daintily folded ear set at the perfect angle, and the soft curve of an exquisitely tinted cheek and throat.

He was not dismayed; he rather thought it augured well for him, that she did not dare to look at him. He was waiting now for a chance in the course of the play when he might whisper a question into that ear turned so invitingly towards him. He got his chance when Jaques, in whom Dalton thought he recognized the young collegian of the year before, was arguing with Touch-

stone the respective merits of the "retort courteous" and the intervening stages to "the lie direct."

"May I come over to Beauvoir to-morrow," he murmured, "and finish the story I started to tell you last summer?"

Now was Margaret in desperate plight. This, then, was the reason for his coming! She was still angry with him, or thought she was. Should she say "No"? That would put an end to it all finally. Was she quite ready for that? But should she say yes, would not that mean more than she was willing to mean? Her whole future hung trembling in the balance for a moment. Then she bethought her that a yes need not necessarily commit her, while a no would irrevocably shut her off from any chance of reconsidering. Thought is lightning-like in its processes, yet it was an appreciable moment that Dalton sat watching the dainty ear grow rosy red to the very tip, before Margaret, still without looking at him, nodded her assent.

If she had been looking at him she would have seen the expression of intense anxiety in his eyes replaced by a flash of triumph, in its turn softened by a sweeter and stronger emotion as his glance lingered for a moment on the glowing rose of her half-averted face.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"FOR THE LAND'S SAKE!"

It was a momentous evening for others in the Kentwick party besides Margaret and John. Peyton, having given up his seat to Dalton, had strolled away with Hugh to one of the verandas. Neither of them cared particularly for the play, which, after all, was undeniably amateurish, and they were well satisfied with their comfortable seats and liberty to light their cigars.

It was in response to Peyton's inquiry as to where he had come across Dalton that Hugh told him of his invitation, and, finally, his reasons for it.

"I've given up all hope myself, I suppose you know, Peyton," he said, "and it occurred to me that possibly Margaret's not seeming perfectly happy this winter might be the result of some misunderstanding between her and Dalton last summer. So on the chance of it I asked him up here to give him another try."

Peyton was silent for a full minute, then he said earnestly:

"Hugh, you are a good man! I have never known a better."

Apparently he was about to say more, but to Hugh's astonishment some emotion seemed to overcome him. He bit the end of his cigar savagely, muttered something about its being a beastly one, threw it away and lighted another before he said in his usual tones:

"Tell Mr. Dalton for me, please, that I hope we shall

see much of him at Beauvoir during his stay."

Peyton took Margaret and Helen home in his machine and Hugh had Julie and Dalton in his. Margaret was alone in the tonneau and she did not try to talk. Hugh's car was keeping far enough ahead not to give them its dust, but not so far but that the sound of Julie's light laugh and Dalton's joyous one was borne to them at frequent intervals. It stirred her pulses more than she quite liked and it kept her musing on that coming interview until unconsciously she began to look forward to it with less of dread and with an excitement that was almost akin to pleasure. It was wonderful, but a rush of warmth about her heart assured her that in these ten months of silence they had not grown estranged. Just where the threads of their friendship were dropped, had John's strong hand picked them up again with firm and tender clasp.

The sound of that joyous laugh set Peyton to musing also, and it was rather a silent company in the second motor car. Climbing up Clay-bank hill, steep and long, Peyton had to resort to his second gear. The noise of its labored chug, chug, shut him and Helen quite away from Margaret and gave him an opportunity he could not resist.

"Helen," he said, as he bent his head toward her, "I do not think Hugh will ever marry Margaret, but if it should be Dalton instead, would you say yes to that question I have never asked you?" Helen looked up half tearful, half smiling: "I suppose so," she whispered, and by the flash of his lamps Peyton could see her blush-

ing like a girl. And then she sighed: "Poor Hugh!"

The rose garden at Beauvoir was not so famous as the one at Kent Hall, but, nevertheless, it was very beautiful, shut in by high box hedges and now in the late May rioting in luxurious bloom. Rose arches covered with crimson ramblers, pink ramblers and white Baltimore Belles gave entrance at the middle of each of the four sides to two paths of close-cut turf bordered at intervals by formal box and bay trees. Where the paths crossed at right angles in the center of the garden was an old sun-dial; and in one corner a spreading linden with a circular wooden seat about its trunk where a weary toiler among the roses might rest in the refreshing shade and drink in the beauty of the blooms.

Margaret did not expect Dalton until late in the day. She thought of him as coming at the same hour at which he had come before, and she turned over in her mind which of all her summer dresses was the loveliest that she might don it for him. And that was no indication that she had decided on a favorable answer; a woman is never willing to discourage a suitor by making herself unattractive. She may be sorry for him, but she does not wish to make her "no" the easier for him by making herself seem any the less desirable. She had almost decided that it should be "no," for she could find no excuse for Dalton's long silence, but none the less she was mentally reviewing the comparative attractions of a creamy batiste, covered with priceless hand-embroideries, or a

simpler organdy, pale heliotrope flowers scattered over a white ground, in which she knew herself to be ravishing. She had about decided upon the heliotrope as more of a man's gown, but in the meantime she was restless and in her simple white morning dress with garden hat and gloves she sought the rose garden for an hour's hard work in trowelling, weeding and cutting roses for the house.

The garden was not very near the house and so absorbed was she in filling her basket with fragrant Jacqueminots, superb Baroness Rothschilds, dainty La Frances and Bridesmaids, that she did not hear a horse's hoofs upon the gravel drive, nor Tia Elisa's cordial greeting from the piazza where she sat with her knitting, looking sweeter and younger in the lovely May morning, John thought, than he had remembered her. Tia Elisa chatted merrily with him for a few minutes, showing her pleasure in the meeting, and then she said:

"Margaret is in the rose garden. I will send for her—she would be sorry to miss your visit."

"Will you not let me go and find her, please?" interposed John quickly.

Something in his voice made Tia Elisa glance at him keenly out of her kind old eyes, and his eyes replied to hers with such a brave confession that she answered simply:

"Yes, if you like," and fell to musing soberly over her knitting as John hurried away towards the rose garden.

Margaret had filled her basket with roses and now was down on her knees vigorously trowelling up some lovely pansies that had spread too rapidly over the rose bed

and were crowding the roses. John's footsteps made no sound on the turf walk as he came up behind her, and he stopped a moment hardly knowing how to call her attention, and thinking as he waited, how like a little child she looked in her short white dress bending among the roses and trowelling so vigorously with her little hands.

Perhaps she felt his gaze upon her for she turned suddenly and looked up, and at sight of him sprang to her feet with clasped hands and a look almost of terror and yet also of a high-hearted courage that refused to yield to fear. Her garden hat had fallen back, her face was flushed and rosy from her work, and the warm morning had set loose little curling tendrils of her bright hair. John had carefully arranged all that he had meant to say in this momentous interview, but at that look in her eyes, half fear, half courage, so like the look she had bent upon him when she had thought him a tramp, his carefully arranged sentences fled away. Instead he caught her clasped hands:

"Peggy!" he cried, and could not have uttered another word for the life of him.

Startled and indignant, she tried to draw away her hands but he only held them the more firmly for a minute and then he let them go.

"Will you come and sit down under the linden yonder for a few minutes?" he said gently. "I have something I want to show you."

She turned without a word and walked beside him towards the linden, wondering that she was not more angry at him and remembering how she had been so

annoyed with Hugh for wanting to call her Peggy, and yet thinking shamefacedly that she had never heard anything sound quite so sweet as her childhood's name had sounded in John's rich tones.

John did not speak either in that short walk. He had been as startled as Margaret at the sound of "Peggy" on his lips, but it was always in his thoughts and small wonder that it had escaped his control at this unguarded moment. But it had changed his whole plan of action. He was not going back now, as he had intended, to the interrupted story of last July, he was going back much further: he was going back sixteen years!

He waited for her to be seated and then waited still longer until with a bright flush she asked him if he would not sit down too.

"Thank you," he said, and then to Margaret's amazement, as he took his seat beside her he drew out his watch. Was he going to time this interview, she wondered, and felt herself curiously indignant at the thought. But he did not look at the face of the watch, instead he opened the back and held it towards her. What she saw was a shining spiral of red gold hair that stirred vague memories. She looked up at him wonderingly.

"Don't you recognize it?" he asked softly. (He did not quite dare to say Peggy again and he would not say Miss LeBeau.) "A little girl gave it to me sixteen years ago. I told her then that I would keep it and some day when I was President of the United States and she was a beautiful young lady, I would come and call on her and show her the curl and say to her—'Behold the talisman

that has brought me wealth and renown. It's not the President that is calling on the beautiful young lady to-day, but it's a man who loves her with his whole heart and I believe has been loving her and waiting for her all these sixteen years. He has been disappointed in his ambitions—he cannot set that beautiful lady where he had once hoped he might, in the palace of the Republic, but do you think in spite of his failures she could love him enough to share his destiny with him?"

John's voice had trembled very much on the last words, it had almost failed him entirely at the very last, for Margaret's eyes instead of looking the love he had hoped they would, had been growing wider and more wondering through all his long speech. And she did not answer him at all. Instead, she said with look and voice of great amaze:

"Are you—are you—my—?" and then she stopped.

"Yes," said John gaily, glad of the little break in the tension, "I'm your tramp."

But at that Margaret's eyes fell and a rich color slowly rose to her temples. "I did not mean my tramp—I meant my—hero," she faltered, in a tone so low John could hardly catch it.

He seized her hands once more, and this time they did not struggle to be free. "Do you mean that, Peggy? Do you mean I was ever your hero?" And in the passionate exaltation of the moment the years fled away from him and Margaret looking up wondered that she had not always known him, so strongly he looked like the young man marching out to conquer the world. They were

brave eyes she lifted to his, and she tried to answer very steadily.

"Yes, for sixteen years I have been trying to make every man measure up to my hero, and always failed until—until—"

But there her courage oozed away again and her eyes fell again.

"Until what, Peggy?" John insisted softly, for he longed to hear the words he hoped she would say.

"Until—you came," she whispered under her breath, and then looked up at him with dancing eyes where love and a daring spirit of mirth struggled for the mastery.

The dew was still on the grass, the cardinals were still fluting their morning song in the hedges and a saucy mocking bird still riotously carolling his love madrigals, as John and Margaret came out of the rose garden under an arch of white Baltimore Belles that might have fitly made a wedding arch.

Down the veranda steps came Tia Elisa hurrying to meet a visitor coming up the gravel drive. At sight of Dalton the visitor stopped short.

"For the l-a-n-d's *sake!* what brought *you* here!" said the visitor.

"Miss LeBeau brought me," said John looking down on Margaret adoringly but also mischievously.

Tia Elisa looked up startled and then her hand sought Margaret's in a tender clasp, while a soft flush mounted to her sweet blue eyes.

But it was Miss Molly who blushed the most; not daring to look up from the ground so great was her embarrassment, although she was not so overcome but that she was able to murmur, in her politest tones:—

"For the land's sake!"

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